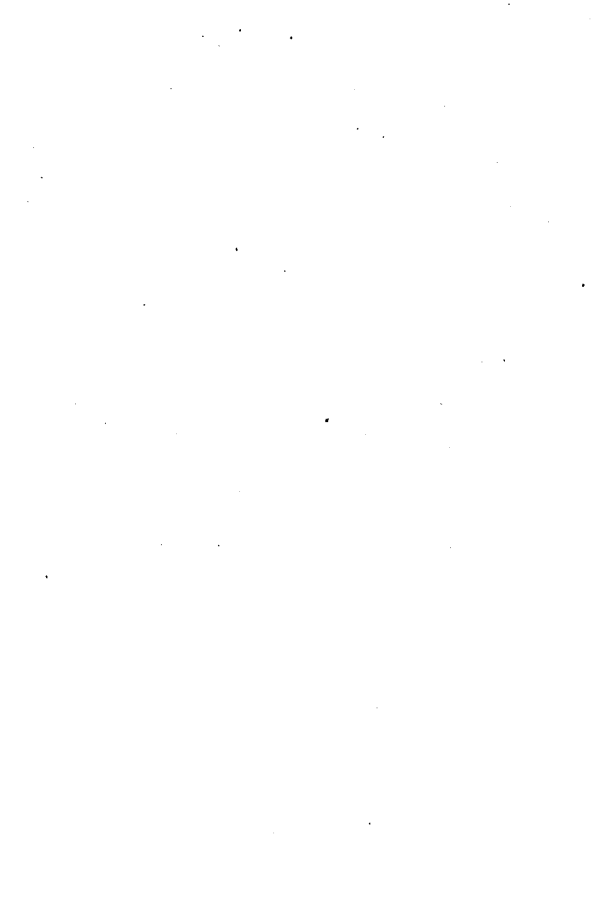


1915.

The University of Chicago Libraries







**THE LADDER OF CHRIST AND
OTHER SERMONS**

**THE
LADDER OF CHRIST
AND
OTHER SERMONS**

**BY
R. J. CAMPBELL**



THE PILGRIM PRESS
BOSTON NEW YORK CHICAGO

TO
HASKELL COACHING

BX 5133
C2 L2
1912

HASKELL

COPYRIGHT, 1912
BY LUTHER H. CARY

Published, October, 1912

THE PLIMPTON PRESS
[W.D.O.]
NORWOOD MASS. U.S.A

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. THE LADDER OF CHRIST	1
II. CONQUERING PRAYER	17
III. THE EAGLE'S YOUNG	33
IV. THE ELDER BROTHER	49
V. THE HIDDEN GOD	63
VI. A WORLD WITHOUT GOD	79
VII. THE NATURE OF DIVINE FATHER- HOOD	95
VIII. GOD PURSUING THE SOUL.	111
IX. THE PASSING OF PAIN.	125
X. A CHRISTIAN WORLD-VIEW	141
XI. THE SENSE OF THE ETERNAL	157
XII. THE POOR IN SPIRIT	175
XIII. OUR ETERNAL GLORY	191
XIV. THE INTRUSION OF THE TRANSCEN- DENTAL	205
XV. THE CHRIST OF THE NEWER CRITI- CISM	221
XVI. THE RISEN LORD IN THE MIDST	235
XVII. THE PRICE OF THE SOUL	249

I
THE LADDER OF CHRIST

“Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”—JOHN I, 51.

I

THE LADDER OF CHRIST

AS with so many other things in the gospels, the account of the call of Nathanael suggests a good deal more than it states. We should dearly like to know exactly what was behind the recorded facts. All we are told is that a disciple named Philip who had just joined himself to Jesus, and who afterwards played a not unimportant part in the life of the apostolic church, comes across someone named Nathanael and announces to him that he has found the Christ. Nathanael is at first sceptical, but is induced to come and see for himself. He does so, and is won over at once by the Master's statement that he had seen him under the fig tree before Philip called him. "Rabbi," he declares, "thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel." The comment of Jesus upon this outburst is that there are greater experiences in store for him. "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Now all this is very interesting but also very meager in quantity. The whole episode is

The Ladder of Christ

dismissed in a few sentences, and we are left to imagine what must have been the psychological background of a situation so striking. We must not forget, too, that it is the fourth gospel which gives us the account of it and the fourth gospel never narrates any incident, however small, without some specific spiritual purpose. What I should like to try to do this morning would be to set before you what I think the purpose is in this case, and trace as far as we can the factors which were at work in the production of the incident which the writer thus briefly describes.

In the first place, it is perhaps not so very remarkable that Jesus should say he had seen Nathanael before Philip called him. We are beginning to get used to things of that kind now-a-days, and are not so ready to scoff at them or regard them as wholly miraculous, as would have been the case with the ordinary man two generations ago. We now refer them to that large class of phenomena, which are attracting an increasing amount of attention, the phenomena designated by the names telepathy, clairvoyance, clairsaudience, and the like. We do not understand much about them yet, but no one acquainted with the facts can deny their existence, and they are having to be reckoned with every day in the vast and complex field of human psychology. It seems to be indisputable that under certain supernormal conditions people do occasionally see, hear, and

The Ladder of Christ

even read each other's thoughts independently of the exercise of physical senses. The case of Nathanael under the fig tree is being paralleled around us every day. Some psychologists believe that the whole race is gradually developing this kind of faculty, and that the time will come when it will be as universally recognized as, say, wireless telepathy, or the Röntgen Rays are now. Its possession does not even seem to be a mark of exceptional goodness, though it is probable that the cultivation of spiritual purity does enhance the power where it exists at all. It is well-known that the lore of medieval saintship abounds with examples of its operation, and the holier the person was, the more was he or she generally supposed to be the possessor of such psychical gifts. I quite believe it; I think the facts prove it; and where people are looking for and expecting such things they are extremely likely to appear. So it is not at all surprising that Jesus should actually have seen Nathanael before he came into personal contact with him. Probably he was not the only religious master in his own day who possessed that gift in some degree, and I daresay Nathanael knew it.

But what was surprising, the thing that really impressed Nathanael, was the spiritual *rapport* which Jesus had established with him before he on his own part had ever heard that such a being as Jesus existed. This is evident from the greeting with which the Master received him —

The Ladder of Christ

"Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" The most probable explanation of this occurrence is that Nathanael was engaged in his devotions, as was a common Jewish custom, under his own fig tree. He was reading and meditating on the story of Jacob with its mixture of earthly and heavenly elements, the sordid and the spiritual, the despicable and the divine. Jacob's vision of the ladder set up between earth and heaven had not prevented him from being a somewhat tricky person in his dealings with others; he was not at all a guileless character, as was demonstrated over and over again. Now Jacob was the typical Jew, the Jew as he became known to foreign nations, the Jew as he is even today, a most curious combination of religious greatness with material cunning. But occasionally in history a grander type of Israelite stood forth, an Elijah, an Isaiah, a John the Baptist, a type in which all tendency to shiftiness and intrigue had been swallowed up and destroyed in all-absorbing devotion to a glorious spiritual ideal. This is what Nathanael had been thinking, and about which he had been praying. Would that heaven might open once more and that Israelites of guileless heart and spiritual mind could commune with God, as did Jacob of old by the dream-ladder on which angels ascended and descended. Alas, he thought, there was not much hope of it; there was no spiritual vision just then; the whole nation had become materi-

The Ladder of Christ

alized; religion was cold and dead; and no divine messenger, no Christ, had yet appeared to reassure the world concerning verities unseen and eternal. He thought he was alone as he communed thus with himself and poured out his heart to God in fervent petition that the shadow would soon lift, that the Messiah would soon come. Imagine then his astonishment when, from the first words that Jesus spoke to him, he found that he had not been alone, that someone had seen, and heard, and understood his most secret and intimate yearnings and desires. He felt instantly, and rightly, that an insight like this could only be accounted for in one way; here was the very being he had been praying for; the force which had drawn them together without any bodily contact was the force of common spiritual purpose in virtue of which they already belonged to each other; the spirit of Jesus had come to him in his solitary hour of prayer because of what that prayer was about and the quality of soul behind it. Philip's call afterwards was merely the accident of the situation, the essential was that Jesus already knew him and meant to have him; his earnest prayer was answered sooner than he had ever dreamed. While he is rejoicing in this, and testifying it in the exultant cry, "Thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel," Jesus quietly adds, "Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these."

The Ladder of Christ

Henceforth the ladder set up between earth and heaven is Jesus himself, and that not merely as an external personality but as the very life of the aspiring soul.

It is now, I hope, fairly obvious why the evangelist inserted this incident here. He wanted this sentence, and he used Nathanael's experience as typical of all who seek the Lord in sincerity and truth. When with pure, unselfish desire we pray that heaven may open, we are never left alone and unanswered, nor are we left without means of access to the highest. Christ is the ladder between our earthliness and the heavenly Father's love, and that ladder is set up in every believing soul.

Only one thing needs to be noticed before I complete the examination of this beautiful text. You observe that the angels are described as ascending and descending upon this divine ladder. Why is that order adopted? Is it not the wrong way about? Should it not be descending and ascending? Surely the angels must first come down from above before they can ascend from below. And who and what are these angels anyhow? Here again we have a conspicuous example of the profundity and suggestiveness of this fourth gospel. The order is not the wrong way about; it is quite correct. The messengers of God here spoken of are not only the spiritual illumination, help, and comfort that streamed down to us in Christ from our Father's compassionate heart, they are the

The Ladder of Christ

holy aspirations that ascend from our souls by the same means to call the blessings down. Repentance, contrition, desire for amendment of life, self-abasement, the prayer of humility and faith, desire for the grace of God, the prayer of self-offering and consecration, the appeal of the tempted and the sorrowful, the loving prayer of intercession, these are the angels of God — rightly named — who ascend from burdened human hearts upon the Christ ladder every day and hour to the source and seat of all power. And the gifts of pardon, healing, assurance of redemption and fellowship with God, the sweetness of consolation in loss and trouble, the peace that passeth understanding which takes such strong and quiet possession of our souls, sometimes, in our hours of greatest perplexity and danger, the love that seeketh not its own, the supernatural strength that no assault of evil can overthrow, the tender sympathy and insight that we need for the work of administering to others the bread of life, these are the angels of God that are always descending in response to our cry of need. I am not sure that there is not a personal signification in the promise, as well as this guarantee of impersonal reinforcement of our feeble endeavors after righteousness. Who knows what invisible friends are active on our behalf from the side of the unseen? The testimony of scripture is very strong on this point, especially in connection with the work of Christ. There is good ground for

The Ladder of Christ

believing that the line of demarcation between earth and heaven is not so real to the heavenly beings as it is to us, and that we are helped and guided along our rough and thorny pathway to a far greater extent than we dream.

O weary ones! ye may not see
Your helpers in their downward flight;
Nor hear the sound of silver wings,
Slow beating through the hush of night!

There are, who, like the Seer of old,
Can see the helpers God has sent,
And how life's rugged mountain-side
Is white with many an angel tent!

“He shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.”

The consistent witness of the Bible, as well as of the spiritual experience of many of the greatest of the children of God in all ages, is that this ministry of invisible helpers is an actual fact, as much a fact as the service we sometimes render to one another by our very presence in times of special need. What the conditions of such ministry may be we do not entirely know, but it is more than probable that the spirit of Christ is its most potent medium, the ladder between earth and heaven, now as always. Those of you who have been to Norway will remember how in that somewhat bare and rugged country the peasants make use of every

The Ladder of Christ

tiniest patch of verdure for the sustenance of their cattle. One of the most frequent sights in the great mountain valleys is that of a wire running from a little isolated homestead right away up to some all but inaccessible table-land whereon grass or corn is kept growing; indeed these valleys have as a rule very little sunshine, because of the prodigious height of the walls of rock which close them in; there is far more sunshine on the precipitous uplands than in the tiny farms below. This is why the enormous lengths of wire are kept in requisition. Busy helpers far up the mountain sides cut and bind the corn as it is wanted and slide it down the line of communication to those who are waiting to receive it in the stack-yards. It is a most curious spectacle, and one which the traveler who has once seen it is not likely to forget. The relationship of our Lord Jesus Christ to the soul of the believer is somewhat similar to this; he unites the uplands of God to the lowlands of human need; he is equally at home in both, belongs to both, and along the line of his spiritual force comes many a boon from heavenly hands that could not otherwise reach us. Jesus is the Golden Bridge that spans the gulf of death, the unfailing means whereby love can pass from heart to heart notwithstanding the barriers of the flesh. This is the precious truth in the Christian doctrine of the communion of the saints, a doctrine of which we do not make nearly enough, or take seriously enough. To

The Ladder of Christ

those who abide in Christ death is not the cruel divider that he seems to be; there is a ladder reaching from our lowest depths of darkness and sorrow to the highest heights of the land of light and glory, and the angels of God are ever ascending and descending upon the Son of man. I do not say that heaven has never managed to communicate with earth by any other method; that would be going too far; but I do say that the fellowship of Christ has done more in this way than all other spiritual powers put together.

And our text tells us, too, a little of the way he does it. For it is not only between earth and heaven that this communion is exercised; as often as not the angels of God are still clothed in the garment of the flesh. Here was Nathanael praying for heaven to open and the power of God to issue mightily forth, and, lo, an ordinary human being, a neighbor of his own, a man whom he saw, perhaps, nearly every day of his life, comes and seeks him out, knowing nothing about his prayer, and conducts him to the presence of the only being who could answer it: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" asks Nathanael. "Come and see," says Philip. What a surprise he got! He had not known the power of his own prayer; he had not known that it was an angel of God ascending through the heart of the Son of man to the eternal source of all good, or that Philip was the angel of God sent through the same medium in response. I

The Ladder of Christ

wonder how often it is the same with ourselves. You pray without realizing what a kind and mighty listener has entered the open door of your soul and gathers up your feeble yearnings into his holy keeping. They have not fallen impotently to the ground; they will not be returned to you void; they have not failed in one iota of the spiritual end you have sought to accomplish. In so far as they are good and true, the expression of your soul's best, a desire of which you have no cause to be ashamed, they will prevail in Christ. Presently some humble Philip will come along, some human being like yourself, knowing not why he is sent or who sent him, but bringing to you the answer to your prayer.

It may be so this very morning. I have often found, as I daresay most preachers have, that people have taken more out of a sermon than I intended to put into it. I mean that amongst my hearers have been some with a specific problem, or a specific trouble, for which they are seeking guidance and help, and they find it in something that happens to be said from the pulpit which just fits the case. The preacher does not know of it, could not know of it beforehand, but apparently God has done so. These are cases in which God's messenger is only an unconscious medium; the real communion is as immediately between God and the soul for whom the message was meant as though there was no messenger at all, just as it was when

The Ladder of Christ

Philip went to Nathanael all unaware that his Master's spirit had been there before him and was only using him as an instrument, and not even a very necessary instrument, to bring about a fellowship which was to last throughout eternity. So, dear friends, whatever it may be that is uppermost in your minds and hearts this morning, realize that it is immediately present to him to whom all power is committed in heaven and on earth. Some seemingly chance word of mine, perhaps, in prayer or sermon, some line of a hymn or sentence from the word of God, may have startled you for a moment with the sudden feeling that your wants are understood in the unseen and that heaven is not indifferent to them. You may be saying to yourself if that man had known what was in my thoughts he could not have spoken more directly to it. But that is just it: he does not know. It is someone else who knows, someone higher, someone wiser and stronger; it is Christ who knows. You may be telling yourself by this time tomorrow that it was a mere coincidence, a sweet delusion, a thing you wanted to be true, but which perhaps has no more foundation than your own wistful fancy. But it is true, wondrously true, tenderly true, infallibly true. No pure and earnest prayer for heavenly succor has ever yet gone unanswered. And you shall see greater things than these. If at this moment you could see how our hearts lie open to God, how our every thought and feeling

The Ladder of Christ

is as plainly apparent to his wisdom and love as it is to ourselves, and even more so, we should not think there was much left to trouble about in this world. Oh, pray God that you may be worthy to see heaven open and to discern in everything that comes to you and to mankind the operation of a spirit that makes no mistakes and wills mankind nothing but good. Pray for spiritual vision and for the expulsion of everything from your life that would hinder you from receiving it. You may be very far from perfect, and yet be an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile. You must become as a little child if you would be wise in the things of the Spirit. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." Do not hesitate for a moment to put everything from you, at whatever cost, that you know to be coming between you and Christ. Let no darling sin, no master passion, no earthly love, shut you out from that fellowship with Jesus which is the open gateway to all that is true and abiding. God asks no more than this; all the rest is with him. You may be very low down just now; you may not have the slightest confidence that you can rise in victory over either trouble or temptation; heaven may seem to be fast closed and to be indifferent to you and to your needs. But the facts are far otherwise. All that you need for the winning of your victory, and the living of a holy life, is near at hand, waiting at the very door of your soul. The listening Christ, the ever-potent

The Ladder of Christ

Saviour, is closer to you than the feet of the very messenger, the lowly Philip, whom he sends with the good tidings. Will you not prove it for yourself, live in the joy of it, and learn to see through all the rest of your earthly days the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man?

II

CONQUERING PRAYER

“And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel.”—JOSHUA X, 14.

II

CONQUERING PRAYER

THIS passage, as you will doubtless remember, is a comment upon the account of the miracle of the standing still of the sun and moon while Joshua and the Israelites completed the rout of the Amorite host at Gibeon. But perhaps you are not all aware that it does not itself belong to that account; it is of much later date and probably of priestly origin. The composition of the story is most interesting, for in its present form it is a combination of elements derived from different literary sources. Of these there seem to be at least three or four — a north Israel tradition, a Judean prophetic narrative, and a late priestly editorial addition to both. Joshua's actual address to the sun and moon is two lines of poetry, inserted here from an ancient song-book the greater part of which appears to have been lost, the book of Jashar. As you know, the earliest records of the military exploits of any semi-civilized race are its war-songs. This is the case with the race from which you and I have sprung, and it was also the case with the Jews. Prose narratives come later. Here, then, we have conjoined

Conquering Prayer

fragments of what I do not doubt was a perfectly true incident. The men of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and become tributary to their conquerors; their land was therefore now Israelitish territory. The adjacent Amorite tribes took the first opportunity of invading it, in order to wreak vengeance upon them for coming to terms with the common enemy. The Gibeonites sent to Joshua to save them and the old warrior promptly responded to the call. The command which this ancient poet puts into his mouth is really a prayer addressed to Jehovah: "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon." It means that he wanted the light of heaven, the light of God's favor, to shine upon his arms, so that the defeat of Israel's foes might be utter and complete. Centuries later a priestly chronicler took it quite literally, as chroniclers often have a way of doing, and added the comment which forms my text. He did not see the point, because he had none of the poetic imagination, but there is something in what he says all the same. It is a recognition of the possibilities of conquering prayer.

In a book recently published under the title "Conquering Prayer," the writer draws attention to the intimate relationship between what she calls victorious personality and prevailing prayer. The following passage from it gives a fair idea of the general argument: "Emerson says of the commanding personality that the world does not wait for evidence of his power,

Conquering Prayer

but recognizes him at once and hastens to pay the homage due to greatness. Such a being conveys his consciousness of his own power to others: 'he conquers where he stands'; before ever his deeds have evinced his worth he overcomes opposition and wins allegiance and co-operation. And as it is in the external world, so also, we may conclude, it is in that inner world of spirit where prayer operates. In that realm, too, when the soul has reached the point at which it becomes victorious, it commands rather than pleads, becoming like Jacob to whom it was said, 'As a Prince thou hast power with God and with men hast prevailed'; or like Elijah who 'commanded' the fire to come down from heaven; or like Joshua to whose personal power is attributed a day of which it is written, 'There was no day like unto it when the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man.' Deem these allegory or fact, as we will, they tell the same tale of the conquering might of human personality having effect in heaven and on earth." You can see, therefore, in the light of the principle thus expressed, that there is a good deal of spiritual suggestiveness in my text, and this priestly writer was quite conscious of it. His literalness need not trouble us; there are plenty of people just as piously unimaginative at the present day, and one almost invariable thing about their psychological make-up is that while they will swallow whole any marvel which has biblical

Conquering Prayer

authority behind it — and, like this commentator, often miss the point in so doing — they will be the very last to believe in the possibility of any similar occurrence at their own doors. This man believed that the sun and moon actually stood still; he was blind to the poetic beauty of the imagery of Joshua's prayer; but, after all, his simple soul saw quite clearly that Joshua had been able to do great things that day, because of his demand upon God. Need I pause to say that this was not fancy but fact? Perhaps I had better, for there are intelligent and morally sensitive people in this congregation who may feel repelled by the suggestion that Joshua's appeal for help, in the slaughtering of his foes, was a worthy prayer or deserved an answer such as it received. To such people I would only point out, in passing, that we have to view such things in their proper historic perspective, and to do so requires the exercise of the sympathetic imagination. The standard of right conduct is always relative to the moral vision of any particular race. I mean exactly what I say — *right conduct*. What we account permissible, or even admirable, today, may wear a very different aspect to a future generation. What therefore in certain details may be right conduct for us might be wrong conduct for our descendants. It is conceivable, for instance, that a thousand years hence readers of history will wonder how it was that we were ever willing to permit people to do menial work

Conquering Prayer

for us, and why, if we did, we should consider them our inferiors, pay them low wages, and compel them to sleep in the attic; it will perhaps seem barbarous that we did not give them the best rooms in the house and the place of honor in our family life. I do not say it will be so, but it is not unlikely, if we look deeply into the meaning of things in the light of the love of Christ. But it would not be just for these people of a future day to condemn us for not acting on this principle now; so many things would have to be revolutionized, and our minds are so wholly unprepared for it, that we have to come gradually to the larger view; all we can do with the present is to be as faithful as we can to what is required of us by the social relations and ideals of the age in which we live. This is just how it was with ancient Israel. To Joshua and his followers the foreigner was a foe, not to be conciliated, but to be overcome, and the favor of God was supposed to be shown by his enabling them to do it. And, permit me to add, there was a sense in which they were right. It must have been the will of God that the human race should struggle upward, through much tribulation, from low ideals to higher, from the service of the tribe or nation to the consciousness of the solidarity of all mankind. Even war has played its part in this, though, thank God, this terrible schoolmaster is no longer necessary to teach us courage and self-abnegation, and we are revolting from his rule.

Conquering Prayer

But you see the worth of Joshua's prayer. It was the highest he knew; he wanted victory for his beloved Israel; and—mark this—life was so ordered as to give him the answer to his prayer, because of the very intensity of his belief in its object.

It is just the same today; the spiritual principle has not altered in the very least, although its applications have. Moral intensity can still make the sun and moon stand still, for the completion of a spiritual task, in the same way as they did for Joshua; prayer can still call down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice upon the altar of the human heart, and can still prevail with God in the solitary midnight conflict. There is a great law behind all this, and I wish to help you to understand it, if you have not already done so. It is the law that life will give us what we require in proportion to the intensity and force of our demand, and along the same plane. If our desires are material, and formulate themselves as such, they will be honored, but in the end we shall find the results unsatisfying; if they are spiritual, but for personal good only, the response will be of the same nature as the prayer, until we discover that it comes between us and our own highest; but if the prayer be consistently from the standpoint of that highest it will mold us accordingly and bring to us an ever increasing meed of power and joy. Life is like playing an organ; you will get whatever note you press

Conquering Prayer

strongly enough, and there are no silent stops. I dare say there are some men here who think they do not believe in prayer; call it childish nonsense, evidence of a neurotic tendency, weakness, or effeminacy of character, and so on. But let me tell you that you do believe in prayer, every one of you, and you will have shown it over and over again by this time to-morrow. Have you ever known a man whose thoughts were so entirely concentrated upon material success, say, money-making, that he could hardly think of anything else? Have you observed how his thoughts have molded him as he has grown older? If you knew him as a lad you probably also knew that there were other latent possibilities in him which have never come to fruition; having chosen his pathway he has become more and more like his pursuits until they have become stamped on the very expression of his face. You have sometimes been astonished at the extraordinary way in which circumstances seem to fit that man's convenience; he has a sort of instinct for knowing how to turn things to the best advantage, so far as his own interest is concerned; you have heard others say with chagrin that he has "the devil's luck." It is quite true; so he has; his success belongs to that order. But has it ever occurred to you that that man is getting the answer to his prayers? That is just what he is doing, and in spite of his outward success he is miserably poor. The note

Conquering Prayer

he has been sounding on God's organ with all the pressure of his personality is gain, gain, gain, and the answer is just what he deserves, though he may not find it out till he goes naked to the judgment seat of Christ. It is possible, of course, that he may have all the desire for worldly gain without the success. This does not invalidate the general principle; whether he succeeds or whether he fails he is the kind of man his prayers have made. . . . "He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul."

A little higher in the scale are the prayers which express themselves as ambition, desire for fame, power over one's fellows, and the like. I do not suppose Napoleon cared much about money for its own sake, but he was a monomaniac for personal aggrandizement. What he did on a colossal scale, and with all the impetus of a mighty genius, most of us are doing on a minor scale with limited ability and opportunities. But, as God sees, the results are not so very different. Viewed from far enough above, a hawk is indistinguishable from an eagle. Are you continually sacrificing someone else for the sake of the good opinion of your little world? Are you doing mean and petty things, compromising with your conscience, in order to secure some little personal advancement which may lead to greater consideration with those whose smiles are not worth having? Then you are an egoist, whether

Conquering Prayer

you have the power of a Caesar or only that of a chattel slave. If one were minded to be cynical it would be easily possible to hold up our selfish foibles to bitter ridicule; indeed we have a way of doing that behind one another's backs; but it is too pitiful for cynicism. What poor, empty ideals many of us live for habitually! How little we see ourselves as we really are! And, most dreadful thought of all, what a wretched use many of us are making of God's great gift of prayer! For this is praying, mind you — although it seldom receives the name. By the great law of "spiritual equivalents" we are receiving just what we demand, and the amount of it is in direct proportion to our faith, or confidence, in the outcome of the prayer. You notice, for instance, that one woman will want to get into high society and fail, while another, no better endowed, succeeds; the difference is in the quality of their faith — if I may be permitted to use that great and important word for an act of the will so worldly and small.

But let us quit these lower levels and come to the higher ranges of spiritual activity. What about the prayer that is the concentrated desire for purity of heart, greatness of soul, love for God and man? What about the appeal for comfort in time of sorrow or the cry for deliverance in an hour of temptation? "Is there no balm in Gilead, is there no physician there?" . . . Some people will tell you that it is a perilous

Conquering Prayer

thing to expect answers to prayer, because God cannot change his plans to meet our needs. But there is no necessity for God to change his plans; the bestowal of his gifts is contingent upon our taking power. All we can ever need or desire is already present in his loving purpose for our good and only waits to be claimed; but it must be claimed, for that is the necessary condition by which alone the soul can grow; it is no use complaining of hunger if you do not eat when food is before you. There is no breach of the divine order in the answer given to the prayer of simple faith, and I believe with all my heart that the more definite and purposeful we can be in our petitions the better. Spiritual life is like the gradual ascent of a majestic mountain from whose sides an ever larger and fuller view of the surrounding landscape is obtained, but always imperfect till we get to the top; and prayer is our means of locomotion. If it be feeble and spasmodic we make little or no headway; if it be constant and determined it lifts us daily nearer to our eternal goal and enables us to understand better and more clearly the beauty and glory of our heritage in God. Sometimes the way is rough and stony; at others it lies through muddy places; for long distances we walk in the gloom and shadow of a forest that shuts out the brightness of the vision we have seen in happier days. But ever and anon, if we are faithful to the best we know, God brings us safely out upon some new emi-

Conquering Prayer

nence and shows us a wider vista of truth and love than we ever dreamed of.

“There are, who, like the seer of old,
Can see the helpers God has sent,
And how life’s rugged mountain-side
Is white with many an angel tent!

“They hear the heralds whom our Lord
Sends down his pathway to prepare;
And light, from others hidden, shines
On their high place of faith and prayer.

“Let such for earth’s despairing ones,
Hopeless, yet longing to be free,
Breathe once again the prophet’s prayer:
‘Lord, ope their eyes, that they may see!’”

You see how it is; you draw to yourself by your prayers the influences most closely akin to your desires. The higher the aspiration the greater the uplift of the soul. God does indeed hearken to the voice of a man; we are in a sense creators of our own destiny, by the thoughts we think and the deeds we do. We are all different, so different that no man’s life can be a rule for another’s, but our goal is the same. “For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”

“There are some that pray by asking;
They lie on the Master’s breast,
And, shunning the strife of the lower life,
They utter their cry for rest.

Conquering Prayer

“There are some that pray by seeking;
They doubt where their reason fails,
But their mind’s despair is the ancient prayer
To touch the print of the nails.

“There are some that pray by knocking;
They put their strength to the wheel,
For they have not time for thought sublime —
They can only act what they feel.

“Father, give each his answer —
Each in his kindred way;
Adapt Thy Light to his form of night,
And grant him his needed day.”

But all alike may find what they need in Jesus. His was the perfect prayer-life, the life of solitary communion, of earnest activity, of agonized entreaty in the hour of sorrow and desolation. Our confidence in his power to help is all the greater when we realize what it has cost. Jesus has hewed his way through every obstacle that can hinder the ascent of humanity to God, and the road he made has never been closed again.

Fellow-worshippers, let me press upon you the importance of thus living with God in prayer. You cannot really be mighty in the world unless you do. At the present moment we are hearing on every hand that the church of Christ is losing ground, that the gospel of Jesus has no longer the power with the human heart that it once had, that the Amorites have captured Gibeon, which yesterday belonged to Israel. But, brethren, the Church has never

Conquering Prayer

been more than a means to an end, and that end is the realization of the kingdom of God; if our Israel is not intent upon that, then God can do without us. But it is an utter delusion to suppose that God is being defeated, though for a moment the Amorites prevail. Look wider, look deeper, and you will see mighty things in progress. Look at the enthusiasm spontaneously generated on both sides of the Atlantic in the cause of international peace; statesmen were not prepared for it; even the religious leaders were taken by surprise when the outburst came. Listen to the chorus of approval, generous and whole-hearted, with which Mr. Lloyd George's measure for the removal of a great burden of care and dread from the minds of the workers, is being greeted. Do you mean to tell me that you cannot see what all this portends? The nations are waking up from their dream of materialism; the sun is rising once more over Gibeon; this is the working of the Spirit of God in the common consciousness of mankind. Oh, for men of faith and vision to rise to the occasion and plant the standard of Jesus Christ on every rampart held at present by any foe of truth and righteousness! Do you want to see the dry bones live in the valley of death? Do you want to see the whole earth shaken once more by the power of the Holy Ghost? Do you want to see civilization recharged with that feeling of the eternal, that passion for God,

Conquering Prayer

which has possessed it in all the truly glorious hours of the venerable past? Then get to your knees; wrestle with God first and with men afterwards. No great thing has ever yet been done for the kingdom of Christ on any other terms. I believe I am addressing men of God at this moment who could say with all their hearts, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace," if only they could see the flame of religious revival rise again and become a conflagration throughout Christendom. Well, how has it ever risen before? It will come just as soon as we deserve it and not a moment sooner. It will come if we are determined to have it, and are prepared to pay the price in personal consecration and self-surrender. It will come when we demand it with a pure heart fervently, caring less about institutions, and organizations, and secure positions, than we do about the one thing needful, the divine madness, the gift of the Holy Ghost. God grant that it may come quickly.

III
THE EAGLE'S YOUNG

"As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him." — DEUT. XXXII, 11, 12. *Heaven & earth.*

III

THE EAGLE'S YOUNG

THERE is much difference of opinion among scholars as to the date of the poem in which this beautiful sentence appears. Its internal structure forbids the supposition that it can be of Mosaic authorship, for it is largely an account of the vicissitudes through which the Israelitish nation passed after its occupation of the promised land. It tells of the repeated lapses of the people into idolatry, of their sufferings at the hands of mighty foreign invaders, and of the deliverance which God wrought out for them when they had learned their lesson of tribulation. Evidently it was written in or immediately after one such stern period of chastisement — “The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of grey hairs.” Whether this period was that of the Assyrian invasion in the eighth century B.C., or the Babylonian at the beginning of the sixth, or some other, there is nothing in the poem itself to indicate; but it is clear that the author thinks of Israel as a wayward child whom God has occasionally to punish by

The Eagle's Young

giving him over to the will of his enemies for a time, but only to bring him to a better state of mind. "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me. I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand."

The remarkable figure of speech which forms our text is far more telling in this connection than perhaps one would gather from a cursory reading of the poem. To tell you the truth I had never seen the peculiar beauty of it until a friend of mine, who takes an interest in natural history, pointed it out to me a few days ago. He says that when the young of an eagle are old enough to learn to fly the mother bird has to take drastic measures to compel them to make the attempt, for they are never in any hurry to do it themselves. You remember, of course, that an eagle's nest is usually built on some ledge of rock, high up among wild mountain crags, inaccessible — or all but inaccessible — either from above or below, except by the strong wing of these denizens of the upper air. It is almost a prison, although a secure place for the life that is hatched thereon, as long as it remains helpless and dependent upon the daily ministrations of its parent, without which it would soon starve. The growing youngster cannot get away, nor does he want to get away; he is quite content to sit where he is and be fed; he has no ambition to soar upwards towards the sun or swoop down

The Eagle's Young

from his dizzy eminence into the dark valleys that lie far beneath his feet. So what does the mother do? She knows her offspring ought not to stay there for ever; it would be no kindness to let him do so; he is endowed for something far different, and she must make him realize his destiny somehow, if he is not willing enough or bold enough to make the venture himself. The first thing she does, therefore, is to tear up the nest. This alone is an uncomfortable proceeding for the youngster who has hitherto occupied it. The old home is gone, or rather that which made it home is gone; it lies in ruins around him. No more warmth or comfort there! You can imagine how the poor half-grown creature feels about it as he crouches wet and shivering on his narrow ledge of rock, exposed unprotected to all the force of wind and rain. That is the first allusion in the elaborate metaphor which constitutes my text, "As an eagle stirreth up her nest." You see now why she stirs it up — breaks it up in fact. It is because its further tenancy would be a hindrance, an ignoble limitation, to the expanding life she has reared in it.

What comes next? She does her best to show her young one what wings are for. She flies around him, hovers above him, circles round and round before his eyes, in order to tempt him if possible to essay his own powers and quit the needless security of that little hole in the cliff that has hitherto constituted

The Eagle's Young

his world. But he will not move; he is frightened; he feels utterly wretched without that dirty old nest that he calls home; so he just holds on tight and sticks where he is. This is what is indicated in the text in the words, "she fluttereth over her young." But she soon gets tired of this; she finds it is not much use; the fledgling will not stir. So she deliberately drops down beside him and pushes him off his support. Away he goes tumbling headlong into the awful void, shrieking and yelling, and flapping the little wings he has never tried to use before. Nor are they much use to him now, and he would be smashed to pieces for certain, but the mother has calculated all the chances and knows quite well what to do. She spreads her wings at the moment of his fall, swoops swiftly down underneath him, catches him on the opened pinions, and bears him up again to the spot he has left or some other, and gives him time to recover his nerve before the next descent. "She spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings." Before long the young eaglet, growing bolder and stronger every day, knows enough to trust to his own and does it. Henceforth the whole glorious world is open to him, not merely a square yard of rock, and he is equally at home in every part of it.

"He clasps the crag with hookèd hands,
Close to the sun in lonely lands;
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands,

The Eagle's Young

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls."

The unknown Old Testament poet who gave us this fine piece of description we have been considering, was evidently well acquainted with the habits of the feathered creation and had often watched this thrilling performance going on amongst those birds of prey whom we not unfitly term the monarchs of the air. And to what a felicitous use he puts it! He compares the whole process to God's care of his children — particularly, of course, in his (the writer's) thought, the children of Israel. Israel had had no easy time. "So the Lord alone did lead him," concludes our text, speaking of this remarkable nation as though it were the eagle's young and God the mother. The figure is even truer to the facts than he himself lived to see. Let me show you how. The Jewish people were the recipients of a unique spiritual vocation, a vocation which is not wholly discharged even today. The evolution of a spiritual consciousness worthy of this vocation was not, and could not be, accomplished without a long and painful discipline. Early in their history they thought of themselves as being God's favorites; they did not take the outer world into account in their estimation of the scope of his benefits; Israel alone was his choice, so they held, and their land the land within which he could be properly worshiped; Jerusalem and the Temple

The Eagle's Young

were their spiritual home, the eagle's nest, isolated from all the rest of human society. But what happened? God tore up the nest; Jerusalem was laid in ruins, and its people scattered over the face of the earth. To this day this ancient center of Jewish worship and nationality is in the hands of strangers, and only a few stones remain of what was once the glorious Temple in which Jehovah's altar stood. As Dr. Duff has reminded us, the very concentration of Jewish worship round the one altar at Jerusalem — no other altar being permitted anywhere else — has resulted in the fact that Jewish religion today has no altar at all. It is no longer localized, but works as a spiritual leaven throughout the whole world. "Neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem shall men worship the Father." "God is spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." I say that the very break-up of the Jewish national center on Mount Zion has given to Jewish monotheism a spirituality, an influence, and a width of range it could otherwise never have possessed. Christianity itself is one of its fruits.

And how these people have had to suffer, too, to make it so! No race in history has been more persistently harassed, maltreated, driven from place to place, despised and persecuted, than the Jews. What is said in the fifty-third of Isaiah about the Suffering Servant of God is a true description of the lot of this

The Eagle's Young

peculiar nation, especially at the hands of Christians. "He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not. . . . Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." Yes, a spiritual vocation so exalted has only been obtained, and could only be obtained, at the cost of a discipline like that of the eagle's young when their nest is torn to pieces, and they are flung over the precipice again and again, and carried on the mother's pinions from point to point, before they learn to realize how wide is the world in which their vision was meant to exercise itself.

But I must not dwell any longer upon this point, interesting though it be, for it has nothing directly to do with us. I have only mentioned it because it was the most immediate application of the meaning of my text, the one no doubt which, in principle at least, was before the writer's mind when he wrote. But it is just as true of your life, you men and women of America, as ever it has been of Israel. This is how God treats you. We are born into this world endued with faculties and powers which require some wider sphere for their exercise than earth can ever give them, but we need,

The Eagle's Young

too, a great deal of divine discipline to compel us to discover and use them. We are the offspring of the eternal, cradled on the narrow ledge of time, nurtured in the nest of sense experience. Only too easily do we fall into the way of thinking of that ledge as our world, and of the nest of our material endowments as the one possession to be most desperately clung to while we can. Is it not so with you? Are there not many of you good people whose horizon is bounded by your material interests? Your thoughts, feelings, and desires are day by day engrossed with material concerns, to such an extent that one might suppose you would never have to leave them, that there was nothing to be concerned about except "what you shall eat, and what you shall drink, and wherewithal you shall be clothed." I do not mean that you are wicked people; I mean almost the contrary in fact; I mean that you do not yet know yourself or your possibilities. Why, there is something nobler in nearly all your worries than the thing you worry about. That is a thing I have noticed many a time. One finds in a poor home, for instance, the sublimest heroism displayed quite unconsciously by mothers on account of their children, and yet perhaps the object of that heroism goes no farther than the provision of the bare necessities of life. If you ask the poor charwoman or shirt-maker why she toils early and late for such a wretched remuneration as she gets, why

The Eagle's Young

she is content to go cold and ill-clad herself all through the winter, why occasionally she starves herself, she will tell you — that is, if she can be got to tell — that she does it because little mouths have to be fed. It does not occur to her that she is doing anything specially heroic. The husband is out of employment, or he is a lazy good-for-nothing who does not intend to work, so she must turn to and keep the home going. Often the very same woman who will do this kind of thing as a matter of course is strangely defective in other ways. She may be foul-mouthed, gross in her habits, untruthful; she will cheat you without scruple, and lie her soul away for sixpence. But still — there is the fact that the background of her life is something wonderfully noble, something truly sublime, and she does not even know it. The immediate object of all her striving, suffering, and self-sacrifice is some form of material good, a thing not worthy to be compared for a moment with the soul-quality she displays in getting it.

Now this kind of thing is just what I mean when I say that there is something higher than nearly all your anxieties and sorrows, than in the thing itself that you are troubling about. The spiritual qualities you are bringing to bear every day upon material things are far nobler than their present field of exercise; earth will never provide them their full opportunity. You are like young eaglets fluttering their

The Eagle's Young

wings in their prison-home without dreaming of the heights and depths to which those wings will presently carry them. As I have often said, this earth-world has never been big enough to find scope for the humblest saint who has ever dwelt in it; there is something greater in every Christ-like deed than its immediate object is worth, something far more worthy to survive than the whole material universe itself. You instinctively know this, and affirm it, when, for instance, you pay your tribute of honor and reverence to the strong man who stands aside when some ship is going down in order than some invalid woman may take his place in the life-boat. From the merely utilitarian point of view it would be better to save the man; he would be of more use in the world than the comparatively helpless being for whom he sacrifices his life. But somehow that is not the way you measure the deed; you feel there is something deeper in it, something grander than the immediate occasion thereof; it is a revealing of potentialities that belong to a higher world than this. That is the real point, and it is true of everything you have ever done in your life which you can honestly regard as having been the expression of the best of which you were capable. But alas, let me say again, our danger is that we lose sight of this. We treat material things as ends in themselves; we become conformed to this world; we battle hard for our ledge and our

The Eagle's Young

nest, full of dread lest the support they give, the only support in which we have any confidence, should be taken from us.

And then what does God do? Let your experience tell, for I am sure that nearly every one of you could preach this sermon just here as well as I can myself. He shatters your little bit of false security, and flings you out upon the void. Before he does so he flutters over you — that is, he presents your own spiritual possibilities to you in various forms, if you have only faith enough to rise to them — but in the end he compels you to abandon your poor, narrow outlook and trust yourself to the ampler ranges of divine opportunity. Again and again you seem to be falling straight to destruction; your spiritual reserves are not great enough to save you; your wings of faith are not strong enough to bear you up; but, just when everything seems lost, you find the broad pinions of God outspread beneath you, and you are being borne heavenward again, to make a fresh trial of your latent divine powers from some new eminence. You are never allowed to stay long upon any; no new nest of material security will take the place of the old, out of which you have been cast; again and again, and yet again, God's mandate comes to the sluggish or cowardly soul, and you are thrust forth once more into trial and difficulty, till the hour comes when you are no longer in bondage to anything earthly, but, entering upon the glorious liberty

The Eagle's Young

of the sons of God, are able to soar up and gaze undazzled upon the very face of the sun of heaven or plunge without fear into the very darkest depths of earth and hell. Do you not know this? What about that home of your childhood in which you were shielded from all knowledge of the storms of life? How bewildered and dismayed did you feel when you suddenly found yourself without it! You had heard at a distance of the sorrows and bitter-nesses, the dark and dreadful happenings of the great world, but it never occurred to you to think it possible that *you* would have to make acquaintance with them. That is a way people have. We somehow become habituated to feeling sorry for people to whom calamity comes, without ever realizing that we are equally liable to it, till suddenly one day it knocks at our door, and the whole aspect of our experience of life is changed for ever. How did you feel when death called away the one friend upon whom you depended for nearly everything that made life livable? What did you think when you found yourself exposed to the unrestricted play of evil forces of whose very existence you were previously unaware? And am I not speaking to people at this moment who have been flung more than once from a tiny ledge of safety out into the fathomless unknown? You do not learn to fly all at once, you know. One terrific struggle has followed another, and you have been miraculously up-

The Eagle's Young

borne, you scarcely know how, but never twice to the same spot; life looks different to you after every fresh uprooting, every new beginning. And some of you had fallen very far into the gloomy depths of sin before that rescue came; it is not only trouble and sorrow that constitute the danger of the soul deprived of its early shelter — there is temptation, too, the temptation that swiftly lures to moral ruin. But — oh, wondrous love and mercy of God! — we are not left to the consequences of our own weakness, ignorance, and failure to rise to opportunity. The mother-heart of the universe compels us to the venture that involves such appalling risks, but we are never left alone for a moment. The God who moves above us on the heights, seeking to draw us upward while still we cravenly cling to our ignoble earthly supports, will also descend with lightning swiftness into the yawning chasm below to save us when we fall, as fall we must if we will not rise.

“For neither height, nor depth, nor things below,
Nor things above
Shall ever sever us that we should go
From his great love.”

You have even been the subject of some of God's mighty deliverances without realizing it.

You have seen destruction rushing upon you, but, you know not how, it never reached you,

The Eagle's Young

it never hurt you; the very thing you have dreaded in sorrow has somehow turned out to be harmless; the wings of God have intervened and saved you from its menace. Will you not look at life with wiser eyes, and see what it is that has so often come between you and impending evil, who it is that has been teaching you the franchise of the soul? Rise, child of the highest, rise and soar. Eternity is before you.

IV
THE ELDER BROTHER

*“Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have
(all that is mine) is thine.” — LUKE XV, 31.*

IV

THE ELDER BROTHER

IT is my belief that no part of the teaching of Jesus has been more misunderstood than the parable of the Prodigal Son. This may seem a strange thing to say in view of the frequency with which the subject has been treated from the Christian pulpit — perhaps there is no subject so continually drawn upon for the making of evangelical appeals — but I adhere to my opinion, nevertheless. The character of the prodigal has generally been used to illustrate the waywardness and depravity of human nature, and, on the surface, rightly so. But see where Jesus places the emphasis. “*When he came to himself . . . he said, I will arise and go to my father.*” This does not fit in at all with the view that we are by nature children of wrath and disobedience — to use no stronger term. Apparently our Master has his eye on something deeper than the superficial selfhood that seeks its gratification in the far country and in riotous living. There is a truer self, a diviner self, of one substance with the Father, which in the end must assert itself and refuse to be satisfied with the husks

The Elder Brother

and swine of materialized existence. Observe, too, how simple is the imagery of Jesus concerning what follows from this self-discovery in the far country; when the prodigal has learned his lesson, his lesson of disillusionment and soul-hunger, he rises and goes home. The reconciliation is effected at once; the father receives him with forgiveness and love; there is no question of an intermediary or of a price to be paid beforehand. The returned wanderer is spoken of as a son, he has never ceased to be a son, despite his frailty and folly. Again, I say, this beautiful teaching does not fit in with a good deal that is conventionally supposed to be included in the experience of salvation; and the difference is so plain that some modern commentators have put forward the theory that at this stage of his ministry Jesus was unable to expound the true conditions on which a sinful soul could avail himself of the pardoning love of God; his hearers, they say, were not ready for it and would not have been able to understand it until after his own death and resurrection. Just so; but this was written long after both, and I prefer to think that it is complete as it stands. It is most beautiful, most illuminating, and wholly accordant with what we might expect of Jesus. From this parable it is evident that he regards man as a divine being who cannot remain permanently in the far country or be content with the swine's food of fleshly indulgence, because his spirit-

The Elder Brother

ual nature will not permit him to do so. Through suffering, and loss, and humiliation, he learns to understand the true nature of the life that satisfies, the life more abundant, the life that is the knowledge of eternal love.

But there is another kind of experience also indicated in this parable, the experience which has not been gained in the far country, but is of the same quality as that which has. I refer of course to what is indicated in the second part of this piece of picture teaching. If the character of the prodigal has been somewhat misunderstood, that of the Elder Brother has been much more so. Most of us, I suppose, have heard sermons preached upon this theme in which the Elder Brother has been held up to reprobation as an unlovely example of the self-righteous spirit in religion. If we could collect all the literature of the subject, I think you would find that a good many hard things have been said about the Elder Brother — in modern times at any rate. He is generally understood to be the type or symbol of the hard, self-satisfied Pharisee, full of spiritual pride, and ready to condemn human weakness unsparingly. We all know this kind of character well enough, and it is easy to come upon examples of it in almost every religious coterie; in fact we are all liable to fall into it at one time or another; the line between self-respecting rectitude and the Pharisaic spirit is rather fine and may easily be overstepped.

The Elder Brother

But is this what Jesus was thinking when he introduced the figure of the Elder Brother into his parable? Did he put him there in order to condemn him by contrasting his churlishness with the father's generous love? Not at all, and those who think so have simply missed the point of the story. The second part of the parable of the prodigal son is just as tender and beautiful as the first, for those who have eyes to see. Jesus intended the illustration of the Elder Brother not as a rebuke but as an appeal to an element in the religious life of his time which he respected and strongly desired to win. I refer to what was best and noblest in the associations of the Jewish synagogue and even among the Pharisees themselves. You would make a great mistake if you were to assume that Jesus did not love the synagogue or that all the members of the Pharisaic order were spiritually corrupt. On the contrary, as is fairly evident from a careful study of the first three Gospels, Jesus at first earnestly hoped to work with and not against the religious traditions of Israel. Mr. Montefiore has, I think, successfully shown in his very interesting book on the Gospels from a Jewish Point of View, that there was much that was admirable and elevated in the religious life of the typical synagogue in Jesus' day. Amongst some of our Master's most attached followers, including probably the writer of St. Luke's Gospel himself, were men of Pharisaic train-

The Elder Brother

ing, and there were few, if any, who had not originally belonged to the synagogue. I believe then that Jesus intended the illustration of the Elder Brother as an appeal to all such good and pious people. He recognized their worth, and would fain have had them join him in his mission to the wanderers and outcasts. If, as Professor A. B. Bruce suggests, this fifteenth chapter of St. Luke represents the sermon preached in the house of Matthew the publican to a congregation of publicans and sinners, with an audience of astonished Pharisees standing on the outskirts of the throng in the open courtyard, the fact is very touching. For the text of that sermon is recorded by Matthew alone: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matthew belonged to the class which specially needed that gracious invitation. Luke, on the other hand, supposing him to have been present, would be more likely to be impressed by the closing words of the address in which, turning for a moment from the assembly of disreputable folk, Jesus lifted his gaze to the respectable synagogue-goers in the background. For Luke was a gentleman, a man of education: he writes better Greek than Matthew and Mark; his associations were all with the established order in religion. Yet he had a great compassion for the poor and sorrowful; it is not for nothing that his name has come down to us as "the beloved physician." Who

The Elder Brother

knows? perhaps he was one of the converts on this memorable occasion; to say so would account satisfactorily both for the minute care with which he has recorded this parable and for the tender compassionateness which colors all he says about the suffering and down-trodden to whom the message of Jesus came.

For just look what Jesus says about this Elder Brother. "He was angry, and would not go in." Was this unnatural? What would you have done under the same circumstances? Would you have been overjoyed to have scape-grace home again feeding at your expense after he had wasted his substance in riotous living? Not if I know human nature. Remember, the father had "divided unto them his living." Apparently the fatted calf belonged to the Elder Brother after all! How would you have liked your property dealt with in that fashion, without your being present to say yea or nay? And listen to the form of his exhortation. "Lo, all these many years do I serve thee, and never transgressed a commandment of thine." For this he had enjoyed no reward, and asked none, except to go on living with his father. At the very moment when music and dancing were going on over the prodigal's return he was in the field at work. The father acknowledges the justice of his claim. "Son," he says — or rather "child," "child of my heart," for the term used here is one of sweet affection; it is not the same as

The Elder Brother

the word "son" in the preceding verses, but a far tenderer and more familiar term — "thou art ever with me, and all that is mine is thine." He could have been no mean or selfish character of whom this acknowledgment was made. Note the last words of the chapter: "It was meet that we should make merry and be glad, for this thy brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found." If Jesus had intended to hold the Elder Brother up to scorn and condemnation those would not have been the final words of this piece of beautiful description. He does not say that after hearing them the elder son refused to go in; he just leaves that question open. Is it not obvious that in so doing he intended to appeal to all the righteous and God-fearing people with whom his exhortation might have any force, to come to the rescue, to pity and help the lost ones of earth back from the weariness and dreadfulness of sin up to the eternal blessedness of the heavenly Father's love?

The application of this divine message is not far to seek. Amongst those who possess what may be called the spiritual consciousness there are two kinds of people, the once-born and the twice-born. The once-born are those who from their childhood up have never lost sight of God, never wandered in the desert ways of sin. I do not mean that they are spiritually perfect or that they have never had to learn any of the lessons which sorrow alone

The Elder Brother

can teach; but I mean that their spiritual life unfolds as sweetly and as quietly as a flower grows and blooms in the light of spring and summer. There may come seasons of darkness and pain, but they just continue to live upon their consciousness of the presence of God, as a flower at night-time gathers and folds within its closed leaves the heat it has absorbed during the day and waits till the morning breaks again.

“As the delicate rose
To the sun’s sweet strength
Doth herself unclose,
Breadth and length;
So spreads my heart to thee
Unveiled utterly,
I to thee
Utterly.”

I daresay most of you have known some such person, a being who without any special illumination has simply lived unbrokenly in the light of God all his or her days. Such a man, for instance, was the saintly Faber whose hymns appear in nearly every Protestant collection, though he himself quitted the Anglican communion to become a devoted son of the Church of Rome. In his religious experience he passed from the extremest Calvinism to the most uncompromising sacerdotalism, but he has left it on record that there was no correspondingly profound change in his inner spiritual life; from his earliest youth he always possessed

The Elder Brother

the sense of God in a remarkable degree. From his youth up he exhibited an almost unearthly purity of character; his spiritual consciousness became deeper and richer with the lapse of time, but he never had any revolution to record in regard to it; there was no coming out of darkness into light; he knew God from the first; he was of the once-born. Such a woman, again, was Madame Guyon. Her religious life was one of struggle and sorrow for many years — indeed few people have ever endured more in the search for holiness — but there never was a time in her experience when she did not know God as the one supreme reality beside whom everything else was of small account. Almost the same could be said of the great Tractarian divine, John Keble, author of the *Christian Year*. It has been said of Keble that his main contribution to the High Church movement consisted neither in his learning nor his native ability, both of which were considerable, but in the rare elevation and beauty of his character. On one occasion a young man was sent to him in order that he might be cured of his doubts. He lived with Keble for some time, but not one word of argument ever passed between them concerning the problems which were exercising the visitor's mind; at length he took his departure, perfectly satisfied, all his doubts at rest; the spell of Keble's life, with the suggestion of heaven that it always radiated, did everything that

The Elder Brother

was needed. I do not know that the beneficiary in this case ever embraced Keble's doctrines to the full; perhaps not, but what does that matter? In the things of the spirit the most precious experience is just that which can never be completely expressed in any formula of the mind. What I have just been telling you is indicated with remarkable force and clearness in Keble's own words:

"Who art thou, that would'st grave thy name
Thus deeply in a brother's heart?
Look on this saint, and learn to frame
Thy love-charm with true Christian art.

"First seek thy Saviour out, and dwell
Beneath the shadow of his roof,
Till thou have scann'd His features well,
And known Him for the Christ by proof;

"Then, potent with the spell of heaven,
Go, and thine erring brother gain,
Entice him home to be forgiven,
Till he, too, see his Saviour plain."

People like these are the elder brothers of the race. The wisdom of the East affirms that they are actually so — older souls who in previous lives have learned the lessons with which their younger brothers are still struggling. That may or may not be true, but they certainly possess something which does not come so easily to their fellows. They are the children of whom our heavenly Father can say: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that is

The Elder Brother

mine is thine." There are not many of them in this world. But there are some of you here to whom in a certain degree this description rightly belongs. You have grown up under holy influences; you have never been tempted far astray; all your life long you have been kept, as it were, under the shadow of the wings of God. You cannot even begin to understand the attraction that some people feel in sensuous enjoyment or worldly pleasure; these things are no temptation to you; you do not want to live foully, evilly, grossly; your whole nature tends another way. Now this is no credit to you. Your greatest danger is that your very recoil from certain forms of sin will make you uncharitable to the sinner, especially when he is a prodigal whose wrong-doing has resulted in painful injustice to you and others. If this should happen to be your experience in any way, I ask you to listen to the voice of Jesus in the words of my text. Just because you are God's home-child, as it were, you must become the channel of his grace and love to your poor wayward human kindred. And do it humbly. The greatest monument of the grace of God here, among us, tonight, is not the man who has been in the far country and come out of it, but the man who has never been in and never wanted to go. It is you who owe the most to the Father's love, not the trying prodigal. Remember this, and be worthy of the privilege. It is not for nothing that our Lord Jesus

The Elder Brother

Christ is called the Elder Brother of the race, and the very fact that it is so, ought to show you what he intended by his appeal to the Elder Brother in the parable. The Elder Brother is, before all things, to be the burden bearer of the weak, the comforter of the sorrowful, and the patient friend of those whom human judgment counts most undeserving.

“Doubtful where I fain would rest,
Frailest where I seem the best,
Only strong for lack of test, —
What am I that I should press
Special pleas of selfishness,
Coolly mounting into heaven
On my neighbour unforgiven?”

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God: for God is love.”

V

THE HIDDEN GOD

*“Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God
of Israel, the Saviour.” — ISA. XLV, 15.*

V

THE HIDDEN GOD

THERE are several very striking expressions in this remarkable chapter, expressions which show their author to have been a bold and original thinker concerning the mystery of life, as well as a great and eloquent exponent of Jewish national ideals. The first is that in which he declares Cyrus the Persian to have been God's chosen instrument for the deliverance of the people of Israel. He actually goes so far as to call him God's "Messiah" — for that is what the word "anointed" means in the opening sentence, "Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus," etc. — and he further represents the Almighty as saying to this pagan conqueror, "I girded thee, though thou hast not known me." Here, then, we have the plain assertion that men are compelled to carry out God's designs, whether they know it or not, and that they may be doing so without even knowing him. For this Cyrus probably never dreamed that in setting a few Jewish captives free from their imprisonment in Babylon he was doing a more important and lasting work than the founding of his own mighty empire,

The Hidden God

and that he had been divinely raised up to this end. His empire perished ages ago, but the Jewish nation he re-established gave Christ to the world a few centuries later, and therefore communicated to humanity the greatest spiritual impulse it has ever received. You will admit then, I am sure, that the declaration I have just quoted is an example of really marvelous spiritual insight on the part of the old Hebrew prophet who made it.

But this notable utterance does not stand by itself. There are several other impressive and even startling sayings connected with it, as I have just said. Several times over, for instance, the expression is used, "I am God, and there is none else." This is a much more audacious claim than it seems on the surface; it only amounts to an assertion of monotheism; but when we remember that it is put forward on behalf of the deity worshiped by a tiny, unimportant, downtrodden, enslaved people, it only shows how lofty was their religious experience as compared with that of their neighbors, and how real and deep it must have been to have survived so many national sorrows. For they had suffered dreadfully, these people, unspeakably, and yet through it all they retained a firm, even an exultant faith in the goodness and power of God, whom they now believed to be not only their God, but the God of all the other nations upon earth. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of

The Hidden God

the earth: for I am God, and there is none else."

A third expression, paradoxical in form, but full of significance, is this: "I form the light, and create the darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I the Lord do all these things." How much the prophet meant by a drastic saying of this kind one cannot be sure, but as we know that ancient Israelitish thought did attribute to the deity the operation of what man calls evil as well as what he calls good, there seems no reason to doubt that he meant to credit God with all that Israel had suffered in the past. But he does not presume to say why this experience of evil has had to be gone through or why the innocent should have had to suffer along with the guilty. He confesses that he stands helpless before the inscrutableness of God's ways with mankind, although with all his heart he believes in the final deliverance of the righteous from the power of everything dark and sad. Hence my text: "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." Understand, this is no pessimistic saying: just the opposite, in fact. It is the culmination of the series of lofty declarations we have just been glancing at. It tells us, in effect, that God's purposes are being wrought out on a larger scale than men can comprehend, that men are fulfilling them even without knowing it or discerning the hand of God in them at all, that in his works God hides

The Hidden God

himself, as it were, from men's gaze. He does more than that: he visits the world with disaster, affliction, and death, as well as with blessing, gladness, and life, no one can tell why. Nevertheless there is but one God, one power over human destiny; veiled behind the flux of events, but ever and anon revealing himself as friend and saviour to those who seek to know him and who put their trust in him.

The reason why I have chosen this passage of scripture for our text this morning will now I hope be fairly obvious. It is that the very same set of facts, though in a somewhat different form, are presenting themselves as the material of thought and experience today as in this ancient world into which we have been glancing. Millions of people today have a firm belief in God, who would be hard put to it to explain or justify his ways of dealing with his creation. Perhaps it may assist you to follow more easily the course of what I have still to say if I tell you frankly, at this point, what I am now going to try to do. I am going to state roughly the problem of life as it appears to me, and I think to you also, and then ask why, in the face of it, we should believe in God at all and what use the belief is.

In the first place I fully admit that there is many a Cyrus in the modern world acting as the instrument of forces and tendencies of whose ultimate working out he knows nothing. The things that seem greatest to contemporaries

The Hidden God

in the achievements of any man or any nation are not always, and perhaps not even generally, those of most importance to posterity. Cyrus would have laughed at the suggestion that the deliverance of the Jewish people from their bondage would have a more far-reaching effect upon the destinies of the human race than his acquirement of the sovereignty of Babylon, but in this he was mistaken, as we now see. Which was the more important to the thirteenth century, the mighty contest between emperor and pope, the two great medieval powers which at that moment had reached their greatest height of towering magnificence and were seemingly destined to last for ever — a thing which would scarcely have occurred to any one to question — or Roger Bacon's discovery of gunpowder and the magnifying glass? There can be no question as to the proper answer. Which was the more important event in the later fifteenth century, to Spain and to the world, Ferdinand and Isabella's union of the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, or the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus? If you had asked that question of King Ferdinand, in the year 1492, I have no doubt he would have answered promptly that his European triumphs mattered much more than the despatch of a few ships across the ocean to an unknown shore; but what would he say about it now? All else he ever did pales into insignificance beside

The Hidden God

the fact that, after long pressure, he decided to give Columbus his chance. And how little we know, even today, of the true proportions of the events which are passing before our eyes! For anything we know to the contrary, perhaps Mr. Lloyd George's epoch-making Budget matters less than the emigration scheme of General Booth; ex-President Roosevelt's pronouncement concerning the State Regulation of Trusts may matter less than one of Jane Addams' articles on the condition of the American working girl. Perhaps even these names will sink into insignificance by-and-by in comparison with some things going on quietly in our midst of which the great world knows nothing at all. And, what is more, I believe it to be the simple truth that all we are doing in this world, big or little, matters for eternity in quite a different way from what we think it does; seen from the side of heaven it must wear another appearance than that which it assumes from the side of earth. Like Cyrus of old we are all acting, more or less unconsciously, in obedience to forces of whose inner nature and ultimate significance we know little or nothing. The question is, Are these forces the expression of the will of a just and holy God or are they not?

Now, still following the order indicated at the beginning of the sermon, there comes a further consideration which probably presses harder upon your minds than any other. I

The Hidden God

refer of course to the horrible evils of life. The other day I heard of a case in which a bright, pure-minded young girl who went to work in the slums became eventually so depressed by the awfulness of the suffering and degradation around her, by the seeming hopelessness of doing much to relieve it, and by the consequent loss of her faith in God, that she took her own life. I have never heard of such a thing being done before — I mean from the same cause, namely, the contemplation of other people's sorrow and sin — but we have all heard of plenty of instances in which self-destruction has been sought as a means of escape from the sufferer's own personal troubles. And when we know what life is like for untold millions of our fellow-creatures, can we really wonder very greatly at the adoption of such a desperate remedy? Think of the people who are the victims of loathsome, lingering, painful disease; think of the myriads of little children who are damned from their birth, who will — if they survive at all — grow up poorly nurtured, stunted in body and brain, and without the opportunity of leading anything but an animal existence. Think of the respectable people in this very congregation who are scarcely ever free from worry about the means of living. They may have enough perhaps to keep body and soul together, and something over; they probably do not belong to the ranks of the very poor. But that is just the trouble;

The Hidden God

life with such people is one long battle to keep from toppling over into the abyss of a material ruin, in which they will be swallowed up for ever in the mass of those who live from hand to mouth in the dreariest and most hopeless fashion. And we all know, only too well, that if a person or a family once gets squeezed over the border line into the ranks of abject poverty they almost never come out.

Nor is this all. Take practically any rank of society you like and you will meet with tragedies which cry out against heaven and seem to cry in vain. What dark passions are at work under many a calm exterior! What awful wrongs are being perpetrated without the least likelihood of redress in this world! What heart-breaking sorrows are being quietly and patiently borne by people who can never tell to human ear what they are compelled to endure! Mercifully, no one human mind can realize this problem of human evil in its entirety, and one is tempted at times to wonder whether any superhuman mind can either. I forget who it was who once declared that there could not be any God such as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for if he existed the woes of the world would break his heart. There is a memorable passage in Robert Hugh Benson's "Light Invisible" in which he puts into the mouth of a dying priest burning words that tell of a sudden realization of the weight of this awful burden of human suffering and sin.

The Hidden God

"The sorrows of the world," he said, "and the sorrows under the earth! They come to me now, because I have not understood them, nor wept for them. . . . You, my son," he added, "what have you done to help our Lord and his children? Have you watched or slept? Couldst thou not watch with me one hour? What share have you borne in the Incarnation? Have you believed for those who could not believe, hoped for the despairing, loved and adored for the cold? And if you could not understand nor do this, have you at least welcomed pain that would have made you one with them? Have you even pitied them? Or have you hidden your face for fear you should grieve too much? . . . Ah! they are in the room! They look at me from the air! I cannot bear it."

And yet apparently God can!

"He hides himself so wondrously,
As though there were no God;
He is least seen when all the powers
Of ill are most abroad."

We have now reached the crux of the sermon. I ask you why, in the face of such an experience as this, we should continue to have faith in God and how it can help us. For, look you, the most outstanding fact on earth today is the fact that millions upon millions of men and women, some of them the best of their kind, not only do believe in God but believe in him

The Hidden God

exultantly, whole-heartedly, with a force and glow with which no other act of their being can compare. It wants accounting for. If you heard that the same number of people, and the same quality of people, believed with equal intensity in the sea-serpent, or the canals in the planet Mars, you would take the fact seriously and deem it worthy of being inquired into. It is almost a paradox — certainly a most impressive phenomenon — this intensity of belief in a God who remains hidden and silent in presence of the evil that oppresses humanity in common with the rest of creation. And, let me add, we cannot but agree with this prophet of olden time that there is something utterly baffling, unexplainable, about the mystery of human lot when we have said the most that can be said in the elucidation of it. Most of you who are here this morning already know what I think on the subject; I believe that apart from the experience of conflict with evil, certain aspects of good could never be manifested. How could one manifest courage, for instance, if there were nothing to be afraid of, or fidelity if there were no inducement to the contrary? But, I repeat, when we have allowed the utmost for this consideration there still remains a mystery we cannot penetrate in regard to human lot in this world. We do not understand the deepest significance of anything we feel, know, or do in this our earthly life. Why then do we believe in God? — this God who hides himself

The Hidden God

so completely that some people declare themselves unable to discover any indication of his existence, and consequently deny that human life has any meaning or signification whatever?

To this question I can only give you the answer that comes out of my own heart. I interrogate my own experience, and it tells me that I can no more do without communion with God than I can do without food and drink. It tells me, too, that faith in God works; it produces results, results in beauty and power, higher than the highest that can be produced without it. It would be easy to show that the religious instinct has exhibited many grotesque and dreadful developments, but it is likewise indisputable that at its best the fruitage of that instinct has far surpassed any other human achievement. It has given us Jesus, and it has given us the wonderfully exalted spiritual experience associated with the name of Jesus. What does this argue but that the basis of this experience is at least all we believe it to be and probably a great deal more? For thousands of years the source of the river Nile was a mystery to the civilized world, and it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that it was discovered by Captain Speke to take its rise in the Victoria Nyanza, a vast, fresh-water sea in Central Africa. Yet the Nile is the most famous river in history, and was considered by the ancient Egyptians to be specially sacred.

The Hidden God

And no wonder; but for the Nile Egypt would be a desert instead of a fertile country which, as our scriptures bear witness, was always supplied with food when its neighbors were suffering from famine, and was consequently the seat of a civilization going back into a remoter antiquity than history takes any account of. Long before the discovery of the enormous natural reservoir from which it flows, — a lake bigger than the whole area of Ireland, — modern explorers had been convinced of its existence, or something like it, though it turned out to be larger than they had anticipated. They felt sure that such a constant supply of water, maintaining its volume for thousands of miles through one of the most arid territories in the world, could only proceed from some immense, inexhaustible natural fountain. The Nile is a felicitous figure of the spiritual experience of mankind, or rather of that which makes spiritual experience possible. The ultimate springs of our religious life — indeed of our life as a whole — are hidden from us, but by availing ourselves of its flow, and only by doing so, we have been able to grow the fairest fruits of human character and achievement. Is it reasonable to suppose that the cause is not at least equal to its effects? Is our divine source less than human faith and love have declared it to be? If you were to say to an Egyptian farmer, "I do not believe there is any source for the Nile other than in

The Hidden God

your own dreams," he would point to his corn-fields and smile; and if anyone were to say to me, "Your God of love exists only in your own imagination," I should point to the multitude whom no man can number who have won their victory over evil by divine grace and become conformed to the likeness of Christ. Nay, more, I feel I should be entitled to say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him." I know this life divine in my own soul; I know that no draft has ever yet been made upon it to which its resources were unequal; I know that life, and strength, and joy flow from it in unceasing flood, and for the rest I am content to wait until the great day of revelation comes and we know as we are known.

For my last word this morning, dear friends, let me say that there is nothing in our earthly life, however hard and terrible, which simple faith in God will not transform into greatness and glory. Life may be hell at times, but if you draw with unfaltering hand upon the indwelling God you will not only rise in triumph over all its threatenings, but magnify your soul in doing it. The greater the odds the greater the victory; the sterner the task the grander its fulfilment. Perhaps I am speaking to someone at this moment who is just in danger of losing faith, in presence of the terror of life. You have been able to keep on, and

The Hidden God

play the man up to a certain point, but beyond that point you feel unable to go; you feel your ground giving way underneath you; you cannot stand another shock; you cannot rise to the sublime heights of those royal souls of past and present who have followed to the farthest in the track of the cross of Christ. You are mistaken, brother; you can. All that man has ever done in this way you can do; there is no spiritual possibility to which you cannot attain. You are only halting now because you *think* you have come to the end of your resources. You can't; they are infinite. Think the opposite and see what happens. For "the eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

VI

A WORLD WITHOUT GOD

“Oh that I knew where I might find him!” — JOB
XXIII, 3.

VI

A WORLD WITHOUT GOD

I HAVE just been reading an essay on the "Conflict between Science and Religion," in which the author maintains that belief in God and immortality is, from the point of view of the scientific mind, unnecessary as an explanation of the cosmic process; in fact, his opinion is that not only is there no evidence for either, but that the conditions of sentient life on this planet tell heavily against belief in a personal, intelligent, and benevolent deity. The attitude of mind thus indicated is so widespread at the present day, and is so likely to be represented in this congregation this morning, that I feel impelled to address myself to it. Except in the reasons given for its existence it is no new attitude. Probably it found some expression, though secretly, even in the ages of faith, as they were called, when the church held undisputed sway over the souls and bodies of men; certainly it did so in the civilization which preceded Christianity in the Western world. From the beginning of human thought until today the difficulty of accounting for the world as it is, on the assumption that it is governed by a

A World Without God

divine intelligence, has been acutely felt. In saying this let me be careful to add that the modes in which the difficulty has been apprehended have varied so widely from age to age as to bear but little resemblance to each other. Thus, in the heroic age of ancient Greece human ills were attributed to what was called the jealousy of the gods, by which was meant the desire of superhuman beings to prevent humanity from acquiring such wisdom and power as to become a dangerous rival to themselves. You will find a trace of this idea in the story of the fall, as given in the book of Genesis. Here the motive for driving Adam out of Eden is stated to have been the fear that his newly acquired knowledge might enable him to scale the heights of divinity. "Behold now the man is become as one of us" — observe the plural number — "to know good and evil; now therefore lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever: . . . So he drove out the man." Clearly this is not our way of looking at things. Again, almost up to our own day, a prevailing perplexity of many religious minds has been to account for the toleration of human wickedness by a righteous God. Now the mood has changed once more, and our puzzlement is to reconcile divine benevolence, not so much with the permission of human wickedness, as of human suffering. This is, as you see, comparatively modern, and is due more than anything else

A World Without God

to the civilized man's increased sensitiveness to pain.

But in the Old Testament there is just one book in which this same problem is discussed — the book of Job. This remarkable epic poem occupies a place by itself in biblical literature because of this very thing. No other book attempts it, nor does any other writer seem to be conscious of it, in anything like the same degree. Perhaps, to be accurate, I ought to say that the difficulty of the author of the book of Job is not so much that of accounting for the presence of suffering in the world as of finding a satisfactory reason for the pain of the righteous. At the period in which he wrote the prevailing assumption of the Jewish mind was that if a man prospered he had pleased God, and vice versa. You know how sharply Jesus rebuked this notion: "Think ye that those upon whom the tower of Siloam fell were sinners above all other Galileans? I tell you nay." The writer of Job voices the same protest. He cannot believe that it is only the guilty who are called upon to suffer, and he cannot see any meaning in the suffering of the good. Nor does he seem to question the existence of God, as modern thinkers do who are faced with the same problem. He takes it for granted, and then proceeds to challenge his justice. In the words of my text — "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" — he confesses indeed a hunger for speech with God, and an inability to discover

A World Without God

his presence in the world, but exhibits no doubt that he is to be found somewhere. What he wants is to appear before him, plead his own cause, and demand a reason for the treatment meted out to him. This is very much what Mr. Coulson Kernahan does in one of his little booklets, where he represents mankind as summoning the Almighty to appear, himself, before the judgment bar to answer for the way in which he has governed, or misgoverned, his creation and for all the misery he has caused. Job does not give a completely satisfactory answer to the question he has raised, but his cry for speech with God has become that of many thousands in our own time. "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" in the mouth of suffering man today implies a doubt of God's existence, as well as a wistful desire for his presence and a consciousness of needing him. It is not everyone who feels like this, I admit. There are large numbers who seem able to do without God and the consolations of religion, but there are many who never can and never will. I admit that I am one of the latter; and so, I think, are most of you. Conceive, then, what an awful world this would be to us, if we who long for God, and think we have found him, could be convinced beyond all possibility of doubt that there is no God to care whether we find him or not. To such temperaments as ours life would become suddenly dark, were this to be so, and most of

A World Without God

the higher sources of our strength and joy would disappear. We might brace ourselves up to meet the situation and quit ourselves like men, but it would be a mournful, depressing outlook at the best that would be left to us. As to those who would not feel this lack all I can say is that I do not understand them; they belong to another order of being, admirable enough no doubt in many respects, and quite as good as the rest of us, but somehow different. Is it unfair to say that there is a faculty missing from their mental make-up?

Just let us face the question for a moment. It is a good thing to do, that we may see where we are. Let us suppose ourselves compelled to admit that no trace of a higher intelligence than our own, or of benevolent purpose, is to be found in any department of human experience. What then? No doubt the world would go on much the same as before, eating, drinking, sleeping, marrying and giving in marriage, and seeking pleasure and satisfaction when and where it could. Morally it might not be a pin the worse. I believe it would, but for the sake of argument let us concede that it might not. Religion and morality are not absolutely necessary to each other, although the former has been a dynamic of great value to the latter; we can generally trust the moral sense of any civilized community to go on moving in the right direction. Men are brave, generous, and fair-minded — when they are so at all — not

A World Without God

because they want to win heaven or escape hell, but because they feel like it. It would be impossible to tell in an hour of great calamity which of the people who came to the rescue was a believer in God in the orthodox sense of the word and which was not; they would all work together with a common good-will for the relief of suffering. No, I do not wish to contend that human nature would revert to the law of the jungle if the sanction of religion were withdrawn from conduct. For many people that sanction does not exist now, and yet they succeed in being honorable and upright, and often evince a considerable amount of moral passion and zeal for the well-being of the race.

But — a world without God! Jesus died on Calvary; Caiaphas, his cunning priestly prosecutor, is said to have lived long and prosperously and died in the odor of sanctity. Jesus could have saved himself from shame and torture had he chosen to play the game of Caiaphas. Yet blind Nature knew no difference between the two when both had returned to the dust from which they sprang — that is, supposing for the moment that they both did. Savonarola died at the stake; the judges who condemned him did so for their own wicked ends and they succeeded in gaining them. Time has brought both the victim and his murderers before the higher tribunal of the judgment of posterity, but too late to save the one

A World Without God

or punish the other. What does it matter to Savonarola now that we declare him to have been great and noble and his destroyers cruel and contemptible? Joan of Arc was canonized by the Roman Church the other day. She is Saint Joan now, but the crafty ecclesiastical devils who compassed her destruction, at the bidding of their military masters, had it all their own way on the day she died; they found it profitable to have her burned to death; her pain and their comfort were in inverse ratio to each other. When we hear tributes paid to her memory today we recall the poor girl weeping bitterly as she was borne in disgrace to the place of execution, surrounded by a jeering mob and without a friend to whisper a word of gratitude and encouragement in her ear. We remember the long and weary weeks of her imprisonment, when even the common decencies of life were denied her and none of her own sex permitted to administer to her wants. Her arch-enemy, the Bishop of Beauvais, had no personal grudge against her; he only wanted to look after himself and make sure of his preferment. He got what he wanted. Life was so ordered then that he would be almost sure to get it, and the blind universe looked on unconscious that there was any difference in merit between him and the girl he had foully tortured and murdered.

As ages pass, so science affirms, humanity has risen in the scale of being; new powers have

A World Without God

been evolved, and, amongst these, higher moral qualities have made their appearance — but always too late to save from anguish and ignominy the royal souls in whom they have been first expressed. No one would deny that Joan of Arc stands higher in the scale of being than the Bishop of Beauvais; Savonarola has prevailed over his judges; it is Caiaphas who stands condemned by the moral insight of the modern world and Jesus who is enthroned thereby. And yet — so wrong-headed is the cosmos, if that description be admissible — Nature has been discriminating all the way through against the pioneer of the advancing good and in favor of the scheming, self-seeking opponents of it. It has paid better all along, from the point of view of worldly advantage and security, not to be found on the side of the pioneer. This is the melancholy conclusion to which we are driven, if indeed there be no God and no life to come. For the moment I am not arguing against it; I am only stating it that you may see it in its naked dreadfulness. For it is as true today as it ever was. We do not need to fight over again the battles that have been won by the noble sufferers of bygone days; we inherit the grand results and are called to face new issues; but it still holds true that the balance of advantages is against the man of high soul and unselfish purpose; he suffers for the rest, and the man who deliberately avoids self-sacrifice is beyond all doubt

A World Without God

the one who at the moment has the best of it. This is as it must be in a world without God.

There are other things to be taken into consideration, too, but I cannot spare time to dwell at length upon them just now. There is the thought of the meaninglessness of the warfare we all have to wage throughout nearly the whole of life; the blinding sorrow; the wounding of our noblest sensibilities; the black curtain that overhangs the passing of our loved ones into the silence of death. How pitiful it all is! Poor humanity! The higher it climbs the greater its pain. Better be able to feel and know less, to remain on the level of the brutes, than to pay the terrible price that most of us have to pay for having risen to what we are, the cosmos that produced us knowing nothing either of our attainments or the agony with which they have been purchased. I do not wish you to think I am contending that a belief must be true because it is comforting, or false because it is not. There is something deeper than this. I am only bringing out the situation we are called upon to face, if indeed there be no directing mind in the universe higher than our own.

Now where are we? The so-called rationalist disavows belief in God because of pain and evil, and yet he, in common with ourselves, insists on the moral evolution of the race; the lower has been succeeded by the higher, the simpler by the more complex. The theist will

A World Without God

find no refuge in the argument from design here. You may say the morally higher could not have appeared without a Maker, but you will promptly be asked who made the Maker? On the purely intellectual plane neither side can overthrow the other, but let me point out with emphasis that the Christian has just as much right to the term Rationalist as the agnostic or atheist. Both start with an undemonstrable assumption, as all thinking must. The atheist starts with the eternity of matter, the theist with the eternity of God. Both assumptions are vulnerable the moment we begin to ask questions about them. A child can baffle us thereon and often does. To speak of matter as self-existent and eternal is a proposition as incomprehensible for the mind as to speak in the same way about God. The existence of a single lump of clay is just as much a stupendous mystery as an infinite Creator. It is utterly unaccountable. Where did it come from, and why should it be? Why should anything be? If I am compelled to assume a primal reality as the starting point of all cosmic order and development — as I certainly am — I shall choose to assume not matter but God.

And how does the assumption work? Let us see. The late Professor Romanes, who passed from agnosticism to Christianity near the close of his life, stated the argument from experience thus: "It is a fact that we all feel the intellectual part of man to be 'higher' than the animal,

A World Without God

whatever our theory of his origin. It is a fact that we all feel the moral part of man to be 'higher' than the intellectual, whatever our theory of either may be. It is also a fact that we all similarly feel the spiritual to be 'higher' than the moral, whatever our theory of religion may be. . . . Morality and spirituality are to be distinguished as two very different things. A man may be highly moral in his conduct without being in any degree spiritual in his nature, and, though to a lesser extent, vice versa. And, objectively, we see the same distinction between morals and religion. By spirituality I mean the religious temperament, whether or not associated with any particular creed or dogma. There is no doubt that intellectual pleasures are more satisfying and enduring than sensual—or even sensuous. And, to those who have experienced them, so it is with spiritual over intellectual, artistic, etc. This is an objective fact, abundantly testified to by every one who has had experience." These weighty words of a great scientist are a presentation of the only argument that really holds good in any sphere, the argument from experience. The critic may discount it by saying that feeling proves nothing, and that spiritual experience is merely subjective and therefore carries no conviction to those who do not possess it. Granted; but permit me to rejoin that the whole case of the atheist rests upon feeling and nothing else, and that as all

A World Without God

experience is subjective none should be flouted if its fruits be good. There is no rationalist in existence who would not insist upon morality and applaud self-sacrifice in a great cause. Where is his rationalism now? What is this but feeling? What reason can he give why any individual should ever sacrifice himself for any other or for the good of the race? None whatever; and, as I have already shown, Nature gives the immediate advantage to the man who does nothing of the kind, but on the contrary looks after himself; and yet in the long run the noble act is worthless, if there be no God, for it will not even preserve the race from destruction.

“The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that freedom, all that wealth e’er gave,
Await alike the inevitable hour;
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.”

Contrast the ideals, if you please. At the best the anti-theist can only hope that the nobleness of the individual in offering himself for his kind will benefit the race for a little while, and then — the great silence. The believer in God, on the other hand, declares that the results of such a deed are eternal, and can no more be lost than the God they glorify can be dethroned. Which assumption works the best? Which provides the greater incentive for the doing of the high thing, cost what it may? And, be it understood, there need be no

A World Without God

thought of personal reward in either, but the more majestic and inspiring conception is that which sees humanity eternally one with the living God. Measure the experience produced by the latter against that which results from the former. There is no joy in the whole range of human capacity comparable to the joy of communion with God on the sublime heights of self-effacing love, which so puts a man in possession of his own soul that without it he can hardly be said to have known life.

"Oh that I knew where I might find him!" If you would see God, look for him in the very thing in which unfaith says he cannot be found. Look for him in the wail of human need, which is the cry of self-discovery for ampler, grander life; the beasts do not know it, even though they know hunger and fear. (But who knows? perhaps they, too, are souls in the making.) Look for him in the glory of man, the glory which would be no glory if there were nothing to overcome. Look for him in the brave battles with wrong that are being fought the wide world over. Look for him in the very defeats that occasionally call for higher qualities than victory. Look for him in that in you which bids you rise and war with the ills from which your brethren suffer and make an end of them. Look for him in the patience, and sweetness, and tenderness, and lowly beauty of a workaday human life. Bless him for the great things he is showing you at your own

A World Without God

fireside, and in the doings of those who are your own flesh and blood. Whenever you hear or read of aught that brings a tear of pity to your eye, or awakens a feeling of reverence in your heart for what has been suffered and wrought by man, trust your own instincts; that is God. You have found that which lives eternally, and because of which you yourself shall never die.

“What is the token
Ever unbroken,
Swept down the spaces of querulous years,
Weeping or singing,
That the beginning
Of all things is with us and sees us and hears?

“What is the token
Bruised and broken,
Bend I my life to a blossoming rod?
Shall then the worst things
Come to the first things,
Finding the best of all, last of all, God?”

Yea, the heart both desires it and declares it; and that which seeks is also that which is to be found. Oh, soul of man, thou needest not to seek thy God only in the vastness of starry space, nor shouldst thou ever lose him in the depths of thy despair. Rise higher; sink deeper. Know thyself, and thou shalt know him. Farthest heaven is not too high for thee; deepest hell is not too low. Pluck eternal love out of the fires, and rise with it to where it reigns, calm and strong, upon the throne of power. For that is God; and of that art thou.

VII

THE NATURE OF DIVINE FATHERHOOD

*“And call no man your father upon the earth:
for one is your Father, which is in heaven.” — MATT.
XXIII, 9.*

VII

THE NATURE OF DIVINE FATHERHOOD

THIS is a strange saying truly — one that is not often quoted, nor preached from, for the good and sufficient reason that what it means is not obvious to the uninformed mind. Call no man your father upon earth! But that is just what we do, and why should we not? Is it possible that such an ascetic counsel was ever seriously meant? Well, it was, and there was good reason for it in the conditions prevailing at the time. Perhaps I ought to make clear that according to some critical authorities it is not a direct saying of Jesus himself, but a precept arising out of certain developments in the primitive church. You will not need to be reminded that Matthew's is commonly called the ecclesiastical Gospel, because it takes the church for granted in a way that the others do not and reflects certain ideas which could only have become current after the church as an organization had begun to make its presence felt. Take, as an example of this, the exhortation to refer disputes to the church; this is clearly an anachronism, as the church was not in existence

Nature of Divine Fatherhood

at the time the advice is said to have been given. The same is probably, though less obviously, true of the passage which is our text this morning as well as the verses which immediately precede and follow. Here we have a series of warnings against seeking personal dignity or being saluted as Rabbi, Master, or Father. It is likely enough that the expert scholars are right who see in these the healthy reaction of the new Christian society against the artificiality and worldliness of conventional Judaism. The nascent spirit of brotherhood was totally opposed to the hierarchical divisions represented by the then customary titles of office and honor; it is one of the ironies of history that the Christianity which thus began as a protest against ranks and castes should have eventuated in patronising more ranks and castes than Judaism ever knew. The very word "Abba," which is here reprobated as the designation of one whose official status separates him from his brethren, has passed into Christian use in such terms as "abbot" and "abbé." While as to its equivalent "father" we all know of the universality of its use as a mode of address for the clergy in the church of Rome and elsewhere. Probably Jesus did reprobate this tendency in the religion of his own time as unfavorable to the simplicity and good-fellowship which should characterize the children of God; but whether he did or no, we can all see at once the consonance of an exhortation of this kind with his general teach-

Nature of Divine Fatherhood

ing and spirit. It puts no slight upon natural human fatherhood: indeed it does not refer to fatherhood at all: but only to ordinary human anything that savors of an assumption of authority over God's heritage.

The second clause of the statement acquires a deeper meaning when read in this light; it is the recognition that authority in the things of the spirit belongs to God and God alone. The phrase "which is in heaven" is perhaps a little awkward; the whole sentence ought to read "one is your Father, the heavenly." This gives a better sense, for it does not imply that God is away off somewhere in a distant heaven, but that the heavenly voice is ever speaking in the human heart. This, said Jesus, is the true guide of life; trust it, and do not make over your spiritual autonomy to anyone.

But now arises a deeper question still. It is that of the inner quality of the authority thus designated. The phrase "the fatherhood of God" has become so popular within the last generation or two that there is a danger of its becoming as false and unreal as some other conventional religious phrases which are gradually being repudiated by the modern mind. A while ago the public did not hear much about the fatherhood of God; it was his sovereignty, righteousness, or retributive justice that was preached, to the practical exclusion of everything else. Now it is different; you scarcely ever hear a sermon in which reference is not

Nature of Divine Fatherhood

made to the divine fatherhood as the basal fact in religion. But what do we actually mean thereby? Well, let us see.

In the first place I suppose it must be admitted that when we speak of divine fatherhood we usually refer not only to God's creatorship but to a tenderness that knows no limits; under this figure God is represented as the omnipotent head of a vast household, an immense family of human beings whom he loves with a devotion far surpassing that of any earthly parent. By inference we take for granted some things about ourselves and God's dealings with us which are at least open to question. We are supposed to be a rather wayward family, over whom our Father often yearns in vain; he has placed us here to grow in knowledge and power and to glorify him by using both in the service of righteousness. To this end he has richly gifted us, and surrounded us with life and beauty in a world whose wonders we are permitted to explore but forbidden to pervert to base and selfish purposes. Alas, however, we have sorely grieved the paternal heart and abused his generosity, have filled his world with confusion, and degraded the divine image in ourselves and one another; thus human life, which was meant to be an expanding reflection of the life of God, has become something utterly different and needs to be recovered from the wrong ways in which it has fallen. Hence the sending of Jesus Christ; hence, too, the preach-

Nature of Divine Fatherhood

ing of repentance and reliance upon the changeless eternal love of our heavenly Father.

This, I think, is a fair way of stating what we are supposed to feel and believe concerning divine fatherhood and its implications. Most liberal Christians would subscribe to it as well as those commonly accounted orthodox. Dr. George Macdonald's novels, for instance, preach eloquently and touchingly this way of looking at the matter and have in consequence deservedly exercised an immense influence upon many thousands of high-minded readers. Further, and in quite a different quarter, the same conception or something very like it is frequently to be met with — I mean among the pioneers of social reconstruction. Take the following paragraph from an able and moving book which some of you may have read — "The Broken Lance," by Mr. Herbert Quick: "The old political economy was blasphemy. I should have cursed God and died, if once the conviction had fully got hold of me that He had created man, and put him on this floating raft of a world without provisions for every soul on board for ever; so that only the strong might really live, by making the weak serve them — by compelling the weak to starve, and to devour one another as they do and always have done like wolves. Such a creation would be a devil's work, not God's; and no devil yet thought of has been accused of such transcendent deviltry as so-called Christians lay at the door of a God

Nature of Divine Fatherhood

they call all-wise and all-merciful, in accepting such things as these." Probably you will all agree that that is a noble passage; there is a moral passion about it which elevates it above the commonplace and takes us into the region of religious feeling charged with the love of man. But you see what it is; it is a forceful expression from the side of the new social consciousness of the old-new doctrine of the fatherhood of God with which we are already familiar in the atmosphere of individual Christian experience. Its basal assumption is that God, in his goodness, has made the world to be the dwelling-place of joy and that it might be wholly so if men would but be equally good to one another. And this is a consideration which has considerable power of appeal to the average mind. We have revolted, and rightly, against that selfish and cowardly attitude to life which accepts things as they are, socially speaking, as the will of God, and thus excuse ourselves for permitting them to continue. The canting way in which the expression, "the poor always ye have with you," is often quoted is nauseating; it is twisted from its original meaning so as to enlist the authority of Jesus on the side of privilege. I say we are revolting against that sort of thing, and refusing to listen to statements of belief which tend to throw upon God the responsibility for evils which it is in our power to remove. Hence such telling utterances as the one I have just quoted from the pen of Mr. Herbert Quick,

Nature of Divine Fatherhood

with its morally energizing confession of faith in a divine goodness which has been marred and limited in its operations by human selfishness.

But all the same this does not dispose of the matter, and there is a good deal of misgiving and uneasiness in many thoughtful religious minds in consequence. Divine fatherhood in this sense is not so indisputably obvious as to be undeniable. The world is not so clearly fitted and equipped to be the dwelling-place of joy as some optimists imagine; it is not so for the lower creation, much less for humanity itself. "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward"; and not all our ills are clearly traceable to our own fault. A great part of them is due to causes over which we have no control, such as natural catastrophes or the inroads of disease and death; others are due to our ignorance, ignorance for which we are not to blame. And even when they are the result of our moral defects — our mutual cruelty, greed, and indifference to one another's needs — the question at once arises how far the ultimate responsibility for these defects rests with ourselves and whether an effort of the will in any given case is sufficient to get rid of them. Added to these is the consideration that the divine Father has not revealed himself to his children as unequivocally as a well-meaning earthly father would; he remains silent, or seems to do so, in face of terrible things which fill the earth with woe.

Nature of Divine Fatherhood

Human fatherhood has often been harsh and unloving, but has human fatherhood at its worst ever permitted more grievous wrong and anguish to its offspring than that which God is permitting every day and hour in some portion of his vast and mysterious universe?

It is clear then that there soon comes a point where the analogy between human and divine fatherhood breaks down; the word "father" is after all only a *symbol* to express what we mean by God's relationship to us; probably it is the best symbol we could employ, but it is no more than a symbol. To picture God as a Father in our every-day experience of the relationship suggested by the term is not enough; it excludes other relationships which are just as necessary to our individual and corporate life — motherhood, for example, or patriotism — the latter the symbol of an ideal which occasionally supersedes even the most intimate family relationships. When we use the word "father," therefore, as equivalent to "God" let us remember that while it may include the best we know of human fatherhood it must include a great deal more; it must connote everything before which our human nature is called upon to bow in reverence. It stands for the unescapable in life on all its higher levels — truth, honor, beauty, love. To worship these as abstractions is cold and feeble compared with regarding them as attributes of a Being as near to us as our own soul

Nature of Divine Fatherhood

and as worthy of our devotion as the noblest and dearest friend we have ever known. The Greek philosophers used to personalize the popular deities in this way. Zeus, they said, represented power; Pallas, wisdom; Venus, sexual love; and so on. These abstractions ceased to grip as soon as they became abstractions and nothing more; the moment they ceased to be vitally related to the mysterious Power that speaks to us through every spiritual faculty we possess, and through the wonder of the universe as a whole, that moment they ceased to live. And so will it ever be if we separate our ideals from the thought of allegiance to the Super-self, the totality of being, out of which they arise and which alone gives them binding authority upon mind and heart. When I say "Father," therefore, I mean, and Jesus meant, and all the saints and seers of Christian history have meant, the life beneath all life, the soul within the soul, the force within us that lifts our gaze towards the ideally beautiful and good and exalts us when we obey their call. This is an authority whose imperative no man can ignore, however much he may flout and deny it; expel it from humanity and only the brute is left; listen to it and work with it and the future opens glorious before our advancing feet. I can call this authority my Father, for it is the origin of me, and you, and all that is; I call it my Father because it is not merely a dead force, a blind drive out of the dark and

Nature of Divine Fatherhood

back into it again, but a living, breathing reality — a mind and will, or something more than either mind or will but never less; I call it my Father, and your Father, and the Father of all that is human, because it (or he) is inflexibly myself, and yourself, and all that is truly man. And — most beautiful and inevitable of all — the greatest we have ever thought or known, the sublimest we have ever glimpsed in hours of heroism and self-devotion, the vision of poet and prophet, the glory of the conqueror, the wisdom of the sage, the winsomeness of the little child, the multitudinous things that cry out to us when the depths of human passion are stirred — these are the tokens of the reality behind phenomena, our Father. If we ask, What is the universe and what the ultimate fact of our being? when we get down beneath appearances and let the deepest speak, the answer is, Not matter but spirit, not death but life, not sorrow but joy; it is — our Father.

To see this throws us back upon a reason for the struggle of earthly existence which renders it sacred and yet compels us to the service of our kind with a zest that nothing else could supply. It is that our Father is seeking manifestation by means of the very things which to our sensibilities are most inconsistent with fatherhood.

“There is no gain except by loss,
There is no life except by death.”

Nature of Divine Fatherhood

This is the stern but beautiful law that rules the spirit on the material plane; it only needs to be seen to be acknowledged as divine. The travail of creation is the travail of God towards the expression of that which he eternally is, but can only utter by the cross. My Father is not yonder thunder-cloud, but the light that breaks through it and turns the darkness into sudden splendor; my Father is not the ugliness, disaster, and waste of human life, but the sweetness, tenderness, and wondrous possibilities declared in me and you which without these things would have lain for ever hidden.

“And call no man your father upon the earth.” For no man can completely embody or express this eternal good which is fundamental to all men and is vaster and grander than earth can ever show. To erect and serve any external authority, however imposing, is to miss it, for not without but within is the life that is life indeed. Discover and reveal it in yourself and you have learned to see it also in your fellow-man. What is my Father? He is that in me which makes me long to help you, ease your burden, and soothe your pain. What is my Father? He is that in you which renders you capable, and you know it, of playing the man in the midst of wretchedness, disappointment, failure, and defeat. What is my Father, and your Father, and the God and Father of us all? He is that which looked out upon the world in Jesus, saying: “Come unto me, all ye

Nature of Divine Fatherhood

that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." What is fatherhood divine and heavenly but that which flames up, resistless, awe-inspiring, dreadful, alluring, subduing when what we have hitherto accounted contemptible in human nature and desire rises up and looks down upon us from the skies. Behold the soldier going to his death, not for pay but for his country's life, and you behold something that cannot die, for it is eternal: it is our Father. That frail casket called the flesh will be torn asunder in a few moments amid the indescribable hellish horror of a scene of carnage and blood, but out of its destruction there rises the imperishable essence that is life itself and which all men instinctively worship and adore. Behold yonder gentle sister of mercy taking her way into dens of squalor and bringing hope and comfort to suffering bodies and stunted minds; behold yonder sorrowing mother bending over the cradle of her dying babe or fighting like a she-wolf to keep starvation from the door. What do you see in these, "O blind of sight, of faith how small"? These are the words of God, the laying bare of the heart of our Father. And these are you, every one of you; these are what you came from; your soul kindles at the sight of them because they are its own tokens; to these you belong. Go down beneath all the filthiness of the flesh, all the ruin and despair, all the wickedness and brutishness of human life at its worst, and you will still come upon

Nature of Divine Fatherhood

these; these, and not evil, are the ultimate reality of existence; and these are God. As the beauty of the garden is the beauty of the flowers that grow in it so is the love of man the glory of God. May we all so live as to come to be able to say in the spirit of our blessed Lord, "I and my Father are one."

O son of man, how far art thou from the eternal blessedness and yet how near! How stern thy trials, how bitter thy cup of pain! How dost thou stumble and fall in the darkness of this valley of death! Yet is thy dwelling-place in the eternal light. That light is Father unto thee, and apart from it thou wast not, art not, wilt not be. Let that light shine in thy faithfulness and steadfastness to what thou seest to be great and holy in human thought and deed, and it shall guide thee home.

VIII
GOD PURSUING THE SOUL

*“Wilt thou harass a driven leaf?
And wilt thou pursue the dry stubble?”*

JOB XIII, 25.

VIII

GOD PURSUING THE SOUL

THE thought behind this striking utterance is not difficult to see. An afflicted man is pleading with God not to crush him any more. He declares that he has suffered enough, and wonders that God should think it worth while to keep on showering sorrows upon him. He pathetically compares himself to a withered leaf driven before the wind or a piece of dry stubble cast aside after the harvest has been reaped, and he demands to know why God should take the trouble to pursue relentlessly so insignificant a thing. He has taken everything from him — children, substance, even bodily health; there is nothing left to take except life itself, and that is not worth much now; why does the chastisement continue with such undiminished force? What is the object of it? It is like using the whole force of the universe unceasingly to sweep from point to point a few atoms of dust. In the end, however, as you all know, this seemingly vindictive chase culminates in a blissful union of the erstwhile suffering soul with God, nothing earthly intervening. The whole tone of the

God Pursuing the Soul

poem is lofty and serious; and although it discusses the problem of pain without offering any definite solution, it does at least show that God's good-will to his children is not demonstrated by the temporal benefits they enjoy — indeed it may frequently be the exact opposite, if occasion so requires.

This idea of God pursuing the soul is a favorite one with Christian saints and mystics, as is abundantly proved by their writings. They present it in many ways, but the one they oftenest employ is that of a determined lover pursuing his mistress who flees from him in vain. Psychologically the passion of sex love is so mysteriously akin to that of some of the higher spiritual experiences, in the relations of the soul with God, that the language of the former has been freely used by devotional writers in the service of the latter. Thus the Song of Solomon, or Song of Songs as perhaps we ought to call it, has been drawn upon more fully than any other part of the Bible in order to express some of the more specifically mystical phases of religious feeling, and yet the Song of Songs was not originally intended as a religious poem at all, but was simply a beautiful Jewish love lyric. The mystics, such as St. Bernard of Clairvaux, have gone so far in their use of the sensuous imagery of this love-song as to lay themselves open to the accusation of indulging in morbid and repellent emotionalism, an accusation which modern short-sighted critics have

God Pursuing the Soul

freely brought against them. But more in accordance with present-day tastes and modes of thought is perhaps the powerful symbolism of Francis Thompson's great poem "The Hound of Heaven." The poet's conception is of the soul flying before God, trying to elude him, to get away from him, plunging into first one earthly satisfaction and then another, hiding within successive fleshly delights, but always harried out of them and driven remorselessly onward until there is no refuge left but on the heart divine.

"I fled him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled him, down the arches of the years;
I fled him down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.

"Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,
From those strong feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat — and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet —
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.

"All which I took from thee I did but take,
Not for thy harms,
But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.
All which thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:
Rise, clasp My hand, and come!"

God Pursuing the Soul

“Halts by me that footfall:
Is my gloom, after all,
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?
‘Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am He Whom thou seekest!
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me.’”

There is something almost awful in this thought of a pursuing God, “this tremendous Lover” as Thompson calls him in another stanza, a God who will not let us alone but follows us up with pain and disillusionment while ever we seek our good in anything that keeps us from him. And it is the truth, too, though to many of us unfamiliar. We think we are seeking God, but it is far truer to say that he is seeking us and that we are continually trying to run away from him. We cannot find him by any exercise of human wisdom, nor is a merely intellectual homage what he wants; he wants the soul, stripped of all lesser attachments, and he means to get it, however hard he may have to hurt in order to attain his end. He is a fierce lover, is God, relentless, unyielding, persistent, invincible, and yet of limitless tenderness and a sweet kindness inexhaustible. Who so terrible as God, yet who so wooingly gentle when he has gained possession of the soul! Even with human passion we know how destructive love can be, how closely at times it can resemble hate, how it can blast and scorch when it is thwarted or deprived of its object. I do not know that anyone has ever yet been

God Pursuing the Soul

wise enough to explain how it is that love can be so cruel under certain circumstances; it is all very well to say it is not love that acts thus but something else; it would surpass anyone's ability to say what the something else is. It is a passion of unfathomable depths; it may raise the soul to heaven, it may dash it down to hell. It may be sunshine or forked lightning according to the conditions under which it acts. In Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame* there is a fearful passage in which he describes how a priest, who was in love with a girl who repelled him, had her arrested and publicly hanged as a witch, amid the most horrible surroundings, and laughed as he did it, but was himself mad with desire for her all the time. History abounds with many a tragedy in which a lover has shed the heart's blood of the woman who was dearer to him than life itself and kissed her dying lips as he drew the dagger from the wound. You may say this is love mixed up with a devilish egoism. Not always; and who can say when the ego is out of it? The more divine it is, the more dangerous; the greater the upheaval it causes, the greater its possibilities both of good and evil. I quite admit that this is a startling figure to employ in illustration of God's action upon the human soul, but, as I have just shown, it is one which has been used by some of the greatest saints and seers of the past, as the nearest approach they could make to a

God Pursuing the Soul

description of what they felt about that unspeakable fact.

Look at your own life. How has God been treating you? I will make bold to say that he has hurt you a good deal and probably has more hurting still to do. He has been trying to show you wherein life truly consists and what it means to be possessed of him. For even when you think you want him, and there is a sense — a deeper sense than you know — in which you always want him, you are too easily drawn away by what is unworthy of your fellowship with him and cannot continue to exist in any true union of your soul with the eternal. There are many people who do not know that they want him at all, but they will have to find out by and by that nothing else will satisfy them. The truth is we are all hungry for God; it is the hunger for God that makes us so restless in our pursuit of all kinds of external gratification; it is the hunger for God that is the urge behind all the multitudinous activities of our modern civilization. Most people do not know it, but it is so, and the fact will have to be brought home to us by the failure of our achievements to give us the blessedness we crave. And as with society so with the individual. You attach yourself to first one object of desire and then another; it is really God you want in all of them, but you do not know it; you do not know what you want; you think you want the happiness of

God Pursuing the Soul

possessing this or that, but as time goes on you find yourself disillusioned. Just look back and see how many different things have absorbed you successively from your youth up, and try to recall how often you have put them between you and the highest of which you were capable. Pleasure, ambition, carnal affection, all compete in their turn for the soul's allegiance, and for awhile they may succeed in getting it. To the end of their days many people manage to keep on living for the flesh and the world, without experiencing much misgiving as to the nature of the course they have chosen or feeling conscious that they have missed anything higher. They will have to awaken to their mistake in another life. One does meet with people every now and then who do not seem to care about anything but enjoyment or material plenty or the vanity and glitter of worldly success; they seem to have no soul; they are gross, shallow, selfish, unresponsive to all the appeals of the kind of life which centers in the cross of Christ. They have managed somehow to stifle all nobler feelings, if they have ever had them. For these, and such as these, the dreadful dictum seems appropriate: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still." So far as this world is concerned, and human judgment goes, there would seem to be but little hope of them.

But it is far from being the same with everybody. Is there no one now within range of my

God Pursuing the Soul

voice who was once well on the road to being a frivolous, contemptible, ignoble character, and was saved from that horrible fate by the shock of some overwhelming disaster or heart-rending sorrow? God took away from you the delight of your eyes, and in so doing rescued your soul from the pit of hell. I may be speaking to some one who has passed through an anguish so great that you wonder you ever survived it. How small to you now seem the objects on which you once set your heart! Perhaps in the midst of it, like Job's wife, you were tempted to exhort your suffering soul to curse God and die; perhaps you actually did blaspheme against the divine hand that was so heavy upon you. Perhaps the first effect of your pain was to make you plunge more deeply into sin, in a kind of reckless self-despair, until you had to learn that there was no respite that way; God still pursued you without intermission, through all the noisome depths, and heaped upon you the torturing fires of his wrath — the wrath which is love — until you gave in and shrieked to him to deliver you from yourself. And is there no one here who has known what it is to be disappointed in life of nearly every object for which he has strenuously striven? You have tried and tried again but without success, to get hold of the things your soul coveted. One by one you have seen the prizes you worked for pass into other hands; again and again you have had to forego the cup of earthly joy you were about

God Pursuing the Soul

to drink. It does seem strange, does it not? Now as you are growing older you are beginning to learn that these things were not for you; they would have drugged you into spiritual insensibility; the fruitless struggle after them has taught you something — you are the greater and stronger because of it — but to have gained them would have been no blessing. You see it now and do not regret the pain the vision has cost. Perhaps you can sincerely say:

“The world recedes, it disappears,
Heaven opens on my eyes, my ears
With sounds seraphic ring.”

For God has a wonderful way of revealing himself to the soul that has suffered loss and is thereby detached from ephemeral quests and unsatisfying objects of desire.

But even good and serious-minded people, people who have never been tempted by ordinary worldly considerations, and whose aspirations are on the whole consistently directed towards the eternal, have also something of this discipline to pass through, like the righteous Job. The fact is that, enclosed in its earthly environment, the soul does not easily see what it has to become in order to enjoy true fellowship with God. I have heard more than one true-hearted man confess that they did not know how strong a hold this world had upon them until their deepest affections were shattered by bereavement or something worse —

God Pursuing the Soul

perhaps by cruel betrayal and desertion. Then it was, and not till then, that they found they had to rise to the altitude of a purer, more Christlike love or sink down to diabolical levels of wicked hatred and revenge. For a time the voices of the world sounded far away; nothing seemed to matter; and then the divine Lover laid mightily hold of them and gave them back to life in a purer, nobler spirit; henceforth they saw all mankind through an atmosphere of deep compassion and longing to help. After a long chase, during which they had been trying all kinds of substitutes for the life eternal, God had seized their naked souls and bound them fast to himself for evermore. And, marvelous to relate, so soon as God does this we find that everything we thought we had lost is given back to us illumined and glorified.

Dear friends, I am conscious that what I am saying may not mean much to some of you, but it will mean a great deal to others. And I bid you all take heed lest you fail to hear the voice of the pursuer. God is hunting you through every false experience in which your soul seeks rest, tracking you down through sorrow after sorrow, driving you forth from everything unreal, that in the end he may grasp and hold you eternally, the willing prisoner of his love. This is what is happening to you now. The chase will continue tomorrow and all the days beyond until you have left everything behind but him. And having him you will realize that

God Pursuing the Soul

you also have all you have ever truly loved, all that has ever contributed to the enlargement of your soul. Hasten, hasten away from all that is only of the natural man, away from all the shadow-shows of sense, and find your refuge and your rest in God.

IX

THE PASSING OF PAIN

“Neither shall there be any more pain.”

REV. XXI, 4.

IX

THE PASSING OF PAIN

THE paragraph in which these few words appear is one of the tenderest and most beautiful ever penned. What countless millions have found comfort and encouragement from it we shall never know. I do not suppose there is a passage in the New Testament, even of the words of Jesus — unless we accept the gracious invitation, “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest” — which is more universally known and loved. It is the only definite and distinct prophecy in the Bible concerning the abolition of suffering. There is nothing else on the subject so strong and clear. “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

This is an assurance of which, so far as one can read the signs of the times, our generation stands peculiarly in need. For the age in which we live is one which is acutely conscious of the presence of pain, and troubled by it, far more so probably than any of its predecessors. In

The Passing of Pain

the middle of the nineteenth century the western world seemed suddenly to wake up to the fact of suffering, and the horror of it, as it had never done before. This was partly due to the scientific development which followed the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* with its insistence upon the theory of evolution, the struggle for existence, and the survival of the fittest. Some of my hearers of this morning may be old enough to remember the exciting controversies which followed between the defenders of the accepted religious view of the origin of the universe and the aggressive exponents of uncompromising materialism. Who will ever forget the redoubtable Professor Huxley and the no less able Tyndall in their vigorous onslaughts upon a view of things which was then generally held to be essential to Christianity? It would hardly be fair to call the former a materialist, but the latter in a famous address — before the British Association at Belfast — committed himself to the statement that in matter we had to look for the promise and potency of all forms of life. But from that day forward attacks on belief in God nearly always took the form of a denial of the reasonable possibility of believing in the existence of a Creator whose creation is so full of anguish. Huxley declared, for instance, that he could imagine no sadder, gloomier story than the story of sentient life upon this planet. The whole world of culture became permeated

The Passing of Pain

with this feeling which soon extended to the man in the street. Tennyson, who is pre-eminently the poet of this period, and who interprets the mood of his day as perhaps no other writer does, coined the phrase, "Nature red in tooth and claw," to express the prevailing idea of the ruthlessness of the evolutionary process. It was a most remarkable reaction from the attitude of Wordsworth, and the Lake poets generally, whose special work it had been to recall the world to the contemplation of nature as one mode of the self-revelation of God. Their appreciation of the mystic suggestiveness, the sacramentalism, of nature had been just as marked as the Darwinian emphasis upon the savagery of her methods. The contrast between the two is very striking. The appalling revelation in the nineteenth century of the unnumbered ages of blood and terror through which creation had already been called to pass, together with our newborn realization of the universality of suffering in every order of life, caused thoughtful men everywhere to doubt gravely whether the fact could possibly be reconciled with faith in divine benevolence. That attitude of mind continues practically unchanged at the present day.

In addition to this we have to note the unquestionable fact that the modern world is much more sensitive to pain, itself, than was formerly the case. We seem to be more highly organized than our forbears or our uncivilized

The Passing of Pain

contemporaries — nervously organized I mean — with the result that we both feel pain more and pity it more than used to be the case. I do not know how far it is legitimate to press this. For, on the other hand, it is quite clear that the finer spirits among some of the ancient races of the world were keenly conscious of suffering and felt its presence to be the greatest problem with which they had to deal. Gautama the Buddha, for instance, when he left friends and home to go into the wilderness, was not in search of a gospel for sin so much as a gospel for pain, and his whole teaching afterwards was founded upon the assumption that the great thing that needed to be done for mankind was to show it a way of escape from pain. The Greek tragedians, too, of the same period or a little later, were apparently as well aware of the awfulness of this problem as we are today. But with our own civilization, the Christian civilization of the last nineteen hundred years, it is fair to say that the case has been rather different. Beyond all doubt there has been a very great increase in sensibility to pain within the last two or three generations, though whether that increase has been steady and uniform, from the fall of the Roman empire onward, is more open to question: probably not. One thing stands out plainly all through the Middle Ages, and that is the unspeakable brutality, the absolute callousness, displayed in the infliction of pain. In early

The Passing of Pain

feudal times, when any magnate was suspected of treason against his over-lord, all his servants were promptly seized and tortured to death in order to extract evidence against him. If, when the last shriek of the poor victims had died away, this evidence was not forthcoming he was pronounced innocent and congratulated by his peers. No one seems to have given a thought to the agonies of the poor, wretched sufferers who had had to die to demonstrate this precious innocence. As late as the seventeenth century King James I presided over a case of torture for witchcraft the details of which are too horrible for description, the most excruciating devices in connection with it being suggested by the King himself, who seems to have watched the whole performance with the closest interest. Imagine King George V being either able or willing to witness such a scene! Probably there is no sadder chapter in the history of human suffering than the atrocities inflicted upon persons accused of witchcraft right up to the middle of the eighteenth century, and it is all the sadder when we remember that the worst of these usually fell upon poor helpless old women at the time of life when they most needed care and kindness. Curiously enough the ministers of religion were the very last to give up the practise, and as late as 1736 the associated Presbytery in Scotland passed a resolution deploring the general scepticism which had set in amongst the people regarding

The Passing of Pain

witchcraft; this resolution is couched in very much the same terms as the resolutions passed by religious assemblies today in condemnation of Sabbath-breaking and the decline of attendance at public worship. It is, I think, beyond dispute that nothing so bad as all this was ever known in, say, the civilization of ancient Greece, and it would be difficult to find anything worse in the customs of the most savage races. Then, too, who can now bear to read of the awful judicial punishments which continued in Europe until almost within living memory? — the hangings, burnings, disembowelings, breaking on the wheel, the constant use of rack and thumb-screw, even on women and children. Surely the people who could bear to look on at such demoralizing spectacles must have had nerves like cart-ropes. They could not have felt the horror of it as we should feel it now.

And this, from what we can judge, was precisely the fact. The late Sir James Paget once stated that intense susceptibility to physical pain is, comparatively speaking, only of yesterday, and that the ordinary European of the Middle Ages was not organized to feel pain as we do now. I believe there is truth in this, though how far we can take comfort from it I do not know. It certainly would not apply to the highly cultivated society of which Plato was a member, nor would it be true of the sufferings of such a being as our Lord Jesus

The Passing of Pain

Christ when he hung upon his cross. Still, even today it is evident that a Chinaman can bear shocks and lacerations which would kill an Englishman, and doctors tell us that there is a good deal of difference in the capacity for suffering exhibited, say, by a navvy and a university don, respectively; the nervous system of the latter is much more highly developed, as a rule, than that of the former.

This being so, we can see good reason why the problem of pain in relation to religious faith has assumed such large proportions in modern times. It never did so with our Christian forefathers. In all their elaborate religious controversies the matter seems scarcely to have been touched; it simply did not occur to them to question the goodness of God because of the suffering of creation. But it is far otherwise with us; it is the first thing we think of; there is no difficulty so great in the way of a full-hearted acceptance of belief in the direction of human affairs by an all-wise, all-powerful, and all-loving heavenly Father. We ought to note this particularly. The problem of pain, especially in its religious aspects, is quite modern, and is mainly the outcome of our own vastly increased sensitiveness.

But a very interesting book has recently appeared from the pen of that grand old man of modern science, Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, in which this question is frankly dealt with from a new point of view. His words are the

The Passing of Pain

more interesting because he discovered simultaneously with Darwin the principle of natural selection. Dr. Wallace points out, as I have just been doing, though in a different way, that the problem as a problem is practically non-existent outside the consciousness of our age, the consciousness of civilized man. He combats entirely the assumption that there is very much suffering either in the lower creation or the less sensitively organized members of the human family, and declares it to be a mistake to read our own feelings into sufferers of a different grade. He confines his argument mainly to the difference in sensibility between man and the lower animals, but I think we may fairly apply it to the differences which as undoubtedly exist between one kind of man and another on this planet. There are not many men in this congregation — if indeed there are any — who could sit for hours like James I to watch a fellow-creature tortured, and it is therefore not improbable that though it might have hurt King James a good deal to be exposed to the same treatment himself, it would not have hurt him as much as it would hurt you; he had not the nervous capacity for it. Mark Twain once sardonically observed that he did not think he could thoroughly enjoy seeing even a vivisector vivisected — that is, he added, he hardly thought he would be able to get the amount of genuine satisfaction out of it to which he felt he was morally entitled; unfortunately

The Passing of Pain

his nervous system would insist on getting in the way and making him suffer along with the victim. But Dr. Wallace does not stop with this kind of argument. He goes on to declare that nature does not waste her methods, whatever she may do with her materials, and therefore that pain exists in the evolutionary process for a definite purpose; it has never been developed beyond the point where it was actually needed in the evolution of any organism. If we feel more pain today, or are liable to feel more pain, than our predecessors or our fellow-beings the lower animals, it is because that susceptibility is needed in the development of our higher organization; it has no other meaning, and will not be used a hair's breadth beyond the point of utility.

Let me hold this thought before you for a moment or two. It seems to me to be one of great value on a higher plane than that on which Dr. Wallace actually employs it. It not only tells us something of the function of pain in promoting the growth of the soul but points to pain's ultimate extinction. This is worth thinking about, and all that I have said hitherto has merely been with the object of leading up to this one thing and setting it in a clear light. Pain is a fact of consciousness that warns us of something wrong, something inharmonious, to be escaped or overcome. "A burnt child dreads the fire." Fire is a good thing in its proper place, but it must not have

The Passing of Pain

mastery over the body, or the result is pain. Again, see how many dangers a man is exposed to, and from which he has to guard himself continually, as compared with the beast. What is the result? His very pains, and his constant awareness of liability to pain, spur him on to unceasing effort and therefore to higher and ever higher achievement. Without this repeated stimulus he might be content with a comparatively low plane of endeavor, as indeed has been the case with decadent races in climates where the means of life come easily. But even if he did not thus fail his destiny, even if the spiritual urge within him were always strong enough to compel him to aspire to higher heights of consciousness, pain would still be needed on the plane of the finite to warn him of false roads and deceitful gratifications. Sooner or later every wrong step ends in pain; sooner or later every unideal condition of life is revealed by pain; pain is the fire that tries every man's work of what sort it is. To be sure there is a point at which the ascending soul has deliberately to accept pain in order to reach its goal, but it is always worth while; every pang endured by a human heart in the service of good produces its full equivalent in spiritual enrichment. In such a case the suffering soul is like a pioneer hewing his way through primeval forest, or a voyager braving storms and hardships on the mighty deep that he may bring a precious cargo home. The very experience

The Passing of Pain

thus gained somehow turns to soul-wealth; the man who goes through it finds himself the stronger and greater thereby; the result is seen in what he is; he has been calling upon the fathomless reserves of the infinite within him and building them into character and life. This is what is being done with every soul in all the world. This is what your struggles are for. Out here in the wilderness of material existence you, children of the living God, you, offspring of the eternal, are learning one by one the lessons which will enable you to realize the potencies of your own spiritual nature by and by. All your tasks are directed to this end. Nothing is precisely what it seems. Today you have to stand behind a counter or work a machine or write a book; but neither the things you sell, nor the things you weave, nor the things you write are of any importance in themselves; their true importance consists in what they draw forth from you, or rather draw forth in you. And all that you have suffered in the process, and all that you have yet to suffer, is the necessary condition whereby this object is accomplished. It could not have been accomplished in any other way. Pain is sometimes the signpost that tells you you are on the wrong road to your heavenly home; at other times it is the friendly adversary who says, "Defy me, prevail against me and you shall win your way to the throne of God." Do you not see how inevitable it is? It is no use asking whether God could

The Passing of Pain

not have found some other method of leading man to his spiritual goal. In the very nature of things there could be no other method, and it is God himself who is going through it in the agonizings of his children; we have never been separated from him in the process, nor ever shall be. Even Jesus could not have done otherwise than he did in coming to our rescue. The highest, just because it is the highest, must stoop to share the lot of the lowest; the place of the Christ is alongside the sinner; love must make a way by the cross for all souls to return to the eternal home and partake of the blessedness that comes of "sorrow vanquished, labour done."

"Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three-parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the
throe!"

But equally in the nature of things there must come the culminating point when the evolutionary process has completed itself and all necessity for pain disappears, swallowed up in the perfect joy of the fulfilled divine idea. For, understand, this is all the universe is for; it is God's workshop, in which he is making something, and when it is finished he will not need the workshop any more. The evolution which

The Passing of Pain

began with involution, the imprisonment of a spiritual reality in material forms, will some day release from its machinery the eternal substance on which it has been employed through unnumbered ages, and there shall be no more pain. Pain is the turning of the wheels, the grinding of the stone, the burning of the refuse. When the artist has completed his statue he lays the hammer and chisel away; when the weaver has woven the fabric he takes it off the loom. So shall it be in the divine consummation towards which we are hastening. "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Perhaps I ought to stop now, but I feel that you will pardon a word of direct appeal to the hearts of all before me at this moment. It shall be very brief. Sometimes I have gone home from the City Temple after service on Sunday, or Thursday, saddened and oppressed by the stories of trouble to which I have been listening. Probably few men hear more of such confessions than I do. The situation of the City Temple, and the immense number of people who pass through it from one year's end to another, are likely to make it so. I have come to the conclusion that pretty nearly everyone one meets has a heavy burden to carry, and that some of those whom one would least expect to have a care in the world are amongst the greatest sufferers. It is sometimes absolutely

The Passing of Pain

startling to come suddenly upon the truth in such cases. I venture to think, therefore, that I shall not be very wide of the mark if I assume that the majority of my hearers this morning would be glad to receive God's word of hope and comfort to enable them to continue to bear bravely and cheerfully the hardships of their lot. Well, listen; I have only this one thing to say. All the pain you have ever borne has been the life of God coming to its own in you. Not a single throb of it has been wasted. Get everything out of it that you can. "Let patience have her perfect work that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." Do not doubt for an instant the good will of your Father or that he will bring you triumphantly through. How grand it will be when it is all over, and we meet together to share our gains in the world of eternal light and love. Walk hand in hand with the Crucified, and know that the day will come when all the pain you have ever endured will present you with its full equivalent in joy unspeakable and full of glory. "There shall be joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

X

A CHRISTIAN WORLD-VIEW

“I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.” — ROM. VIII, 18-19.

X

A CHRISTIAN WORLD-VIEW

HOW difficult it seems to be to arrive at anything like a completely satisfying philosophy of history! — that is, such an explanation of the world-process as can include all the facts within its sweep without doing violence to any of them, even if it is not prepared to give a full and perfect interpretation of their meaning. And yet the mind instinctively craves to be put in possession of such co-ordinating principles as will reduce the seeming chaos of human affairs on this planet to a reasoned and purposeful whole. Of course there are many, even of the ablest intellects in the world, who would tell us that it is hopeless to expect such a thing, because there is no discernible purpose in human history any more than in the arrangement of particles in a rubbish heap; generations come and go, races and nations rise up, play their brief part, produce their respective civilizations, and then are overwhelmed or flicker out to be succeeded by others; but as for looking for any design or coherent system in the general jumble thus presented, the idea is absurd. But is it absurd?

A Christian World-View

In company with all who believe that human life is ordered by divine providence I take a different view. To quote the words of Robert Louis Stevenson, employed in a different connection, I hold that human experience on earth "means intensely" and constitutes a rational whole. The problem is to find out, if it be possible, what that total meaning is in relation to its spiritual background.

Now, from this standpoint of belief in God two opposing theories of human existence hold the field at the present moment. Perhaps we shall see that the opposition between them is not so radical as appears, but certain it is that the advocates of one of these theories, at any rate, would refuse to have anything to say to the other, although the same might not be true vice versa. By the first, of course, I mean the traditional ecclesiastical view of the development of things as they are. It is that, somehow, ruin has overtaken God's original plans for the benefit of mankind, and that the world as it has been for unnumbered ages is not what God intended it to be, but something quite different; it is the scene of corruption, violence, and bloodshed, hatred and rapine, suffering and death; it is sin which has wrought this mischief and perverted what would otherwise have been the orderly and harmonious unfoldment of the divine idea expressed in human life; all that can now be done — and is being done through Christ — is to recover a

A Christian World-View

remnant of the race from the general wreck, and let this remnant become in the end the inheritor of the spiritual glory God had prepared for all. It may be denied that it is fair to describe this redeemed humanity as only a remnant, but looking at the facts with the ecclesiastical point of view in mind I do not see what else one can say; it is plain that, according to traditional doctrine in almost any church, no very large proportion of the human race has come within the category of the redeemed.

Such is the first theory, and it has always seemed to me somewhat sad. If this be the true explanation of all that humanity has done and suffered during the centuries of which history has any knowledge it is a somber discovery. Its best achievements have been like the sand castles which children erect on the seashore only that they may be washed away by the incoming tide; and as for its sorrow, strife, and toil, what are they but part of the curse which has accompanied its fallen condition? God indeed may make use of both its achievements and its sufferings in order to further the great end of redemption, but neither of them can be regarded as intrinsically necessary. The whole human race, past, present, and to come, is like a family whose members have fallen victim to some dreadful disease from which only a few of them will recover; these few may pride themselves on the progress

A Christian World-View

they are making, the increasing distance they can walk day by day, the athletic exercises they can perform; their very pains at times may be useful as salutary warnings from which they can learn what to avoid or what to seek that is good for them. But their progress towards health is after all only a tardy re-attainment of a good they should never have lost, and would not have lost but for their disease; and all the benefit they get out of their infirmities is a benefit that would never have been needed if they had only taken care not to fall ill and lose the priceless gift of robust health. I say again that to affirm this of all mankind in the spiritual sense is a sad conclusion to have to come to. If it could be proved to be true the best we could say about it would be that it might have been better, and that we could only deplore the moral catastrophe which had necessitated it.

But, happily this is not the only interpretation of history open to us. There is another which better fits the facts, and which I will now try to state briefly. It is that humanity as a whole, and every human being in particular, is a portion of the eternal divine essence, subjected to earthly conditions, that its latent spiritual qualities, the qualities which constitute the ideal good, whatever it is, may find opportunity to declare themselves. Or, to put it another way, the travail of earth has been necessary that a glorious divine idea might be brought to the birth and live for ever in the

A Christian World-View

eternal world — an idea in whose fulfilment the highest welfare, the fullest self-realization, of every being taking any part in the work will be included. Let me see if I can give you an illustration of what I mean. Last year I went over the Worcester Porcelain Works and was shown every detail of the process by which those beautiful works of art are produced. I remember that the very first thing brought to one's notice was a collection of specimens of the rock or stone from which the clay was made, which was afterwards worked up into thousands of beautiful objects; the kinds of clay varied according to the nature of the rock used in their composition. The lumps of hard substance were ground to powder and treated with moisture until they were of the right consistency for molding into shape at the hands of the potter. Then followed the first burning, then the painting of designs on the vessels by artists whose specialty it was to do this work; then came more burning, until the picture became part of the fabric, then polishing and final touching up before the finished article was ready for the purchaser. In all this we have an analogy for the divine process of which I have just been speaking. God is the eternal substance within which lie hidden, waiting for expression, every conceivable form or mode of the ideal good. It is a portion of this infinite divine substance which has been ground into the clay of our earthly human life. And just as the supply of clay-

A Christian World-View

forming rock in the physical world is practically inexhaustible, and contains innumerable varieties wherefrom works of beauty may be produced, so the infinitude of God contains within itself more potencies of good than the universe of universes can ever exhaust to all eternity. But we, children of his heart, are here that we may utter some of them to his glory and our own. Every saint and sage, every warrior of truth, every way-maker for mankind, all the sweet flowers of innocence, fidelity, and self-sacrifice, are rays of the eternal light, individual notes in the grand harmony of heaven.

Surely this is a better view, a more inspiring and satisfying view, of the great mystery of life and death than the melancholy one we were considering together a few moments ago. Which of the two is the nearer in spirit to Christianity as it first came into the world? Upon that point my text speaks with some authority. The whole of this eighth of Romans is a veritable triumph-song in which the dominant tone is the one I have just been endeavoring to strike. Here, plainly enough, is the declaration that suffering, struggle, limitation, illusion, are the means whereby God is bringing his glory into manifestation. Here is the explicit statement that it is God himself, and not man, or some external evil force alien to God, that has subjected the creation to these conditions. And here, too, is the confident

A Christian World-View

affirmation that this divine experiment will not be allowed to issue in failure but will be carried to a height of spiritual success beyond anything that even the wisest of us has yet dreamed. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." I admit that there are other writings attributed to the apostle Paul, and even other portions of this same epistle, in which opinions are advanced not wholly consistent with this position — at least in appearance. Such, for example, are the well-known passages, many in number, in which the havoc wrought by sin is described with an intensity of conviction which has never been surpassed. It is to Paul more than anyone else, that we owe the conception of this world being the ruin or perversion of something greater that might have been. And it is in this that I find the link of connection, of mutual consistency, to which I adverted at the beginning of the sermon, between the two contrasted methods of interpreting human history which have been occupying our minds this morning. You remember that I said we might discover that the opposition between them was not so radical as seemed at first sight. There is a great truth in the doctrine that this is a world in which sin is the chief factor of disorder. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

A Christian World-View

For what is sin? Permit me a word or two upon this point, if only that we may better understand the one with which we set out. Is it a kind of blight, a leprosy, which has fallen upon human nature, we know not when or how, or is it a poisonous by-product of the cosmic process we have just been examining? Again it is the latter view which best fits the facts of experience. To say that sin is a foul intruder in what would otherwise be a perfect world, and that all our spiritual endeavors, in conjunction with the redeeming grace of God, are to be directed towards getting rid of it, is a poor explanation of things compared with the realization that we are here for a great end, the manifestation of a glorious divine idea, the struggle towards which has necessitated certain risks which result in sin when we fail to overcome them. There is a considerable difference, you see, in the two points of view, but not so much in the experience involved. Sin is sin, however you may account for it, a corruption of our nature, and of our relations to one another and to God, which requires to be cleansed away ere we can fulfil the true end of our being. I am told that in the process of sugar-refining care has to be taken lest, at certain points, the syrup should produce chemical combinations of a poisonous and injurious character. It is not that some foreign body is introduced into something that would otherwise be sweet and pure, but that in the developments which have to

A Christian World-View

be gone through in the production of what is sweet and pure there is a constant risk of some other results appearing, unless a careful watch is kept, and when they do appear they must be thoroughly eliminated or else the whole process will prove a failure. This is what has been taking place in human history. In the crucible of earthly life God has, from generation to generation, been working out a glorious fact whose completion will be seen in the eternal world — the evolution of a divine humanity, the express image of himself, the unfoldment of his own potentialities of truth and beauty; and the risk he has had to take in so doing is that at every stage of the age-long effort poison and foulness have been liable to appear instead of health and purity; but without the risk there could have been neither one nor the other. What could rightly be termed holiness that, while yet in the making, might not have soured into sin? What Christ-likeness would be worthy of the name which had never known anything of the temptation to become something utterly different? Does not triumph imply danger of defeat? Is not the very essence of goodness — does it not acquire its name from — the fact that it might have become badness and did not? I gladly grant that some day it will be different; the goal of all our strivings is a state in which there will be no more battling for right and no more risk of wrong; but, remember, such a

A Christian World-View

state would be impossible — the good as the good could never be manifest — but for the stern experience through which we are passing now.

One thing more needs to be mentioned in this connection. It is that sin can take as many forms as there are experiences to be lived through. Whatever moral consciousness the cave-dwellers of antiquity may have possessed it certainly was not exactly like yours and mine, but what it achieved, the spiritual experience it hammered out, the heights it reached and the depths it plumbed, have become our inheritance and will be included in the grand result of the travail of mankind as estimated in eternity, "that he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together." Now have any two of us, even now, exactly the same task to face or the same problems to solve in relation to the world-process? This is a point which is usually overlooked. We speak of sin as we might of tuberculosis, as though it were a disease which affects every one more or less, in the same way, and produces much the same symptoms in every case. But that is not quite true. A better figure wherewith to describe it would be as follows. A company of settlers undertake to establish a community in a new land and bring the surrounding district under cultivation. The first thing they do is to divide the available territory among themselves, each man having his own homestead. There is a great deal that they must do in common; they must

A Christian World - View

help each other to build, and perhaps to sow and reap also; and if in these respects they do not do their best for each other the life of the community will suffer. But there are other respects in which every individual must rely mainly on himself, though to a great extent the whole community will reap the benefit of what he does. Every piece of wild land has to be cleared and broken up by spade and plough, fenced from marauding beasts, properly watered, and provided with all needful storehouses and barns. All this will mean hard and unremitting toil, and — observe — no two persons will have exactly the same difficulties to meet, close though the general resemblance may be, for no two of the apportioned tracts of land will present exactly the same features; they will vary according to the amount of wood and stream, hill and hollow, and even in the quality of soil, they respectively contain. Every farmer knows this, and knows that farms differ in their peculiarities as much as human beings. But that is just the point of the illustration. The undeveloped spiritual territory which God has divided among his children, from the beginning of human history until today, contains as many unique moral problems as there are individuals to solve them. Every one of us is a farmer and our farm is our own soul; we are farming, not merely for our own sake, but for that of all mankind; we have to develop the potentialities of our spir-

A Christian World-View

itual soil, and in doing that we find that none of us has ever lived whose natural disposition is in every point the same as that of any other. Do you not see what this means? It means that the moral task divinely assigned to every separate unit of the human race differs in some degree from that of every other, though the gain accruing therefrom belongs to all. Your battle is not quite mine, closely though it may resemble it, but the result of your victory will be mine and mine yours, for "we are members one of another." And, conversely, if you fail you have injured me, if I fail I injure you, and both of us injure the total life of the race and hinder the good purpose of God. Can you not see this to be true? None of us liveth, or dieth, to himself alone. What we are, or do, or leave undone is affecting for good or ill the corporate life of mankind, and furthering or delaying the grand consummation of God's mighty plan, which through countless ages has been moving towards fulfilment in that world in which sin and sorrow are known no more. Time fails me to say what I would like to say as to the remedy for those failures of ours which we designate sin, but I can sum it up in one word — Christ. The world-view that we have been taking necessitates the thought of one who "is before all things and in whom all things consist." We fall back on him in our consciousness of need as the baffled waters of the incoming tide, repelled by rocks they cannot

A Christian World-View

scale, roll back upon the silent resistless deep
which lifts them again and bears them onward
to their goal.

“For while the tired waves, vainly breaking
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creek and inlet making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.”

Yes, Christ is the main behind all our puny spiritual efforts, the deliverer into whose hands we fall when evil has broken us and driven us in rout from the spiritual eminence we should have won. Or, to change the figure, his is the heart eternal upon which we can fling the noisome effects of our grievous sins, and have them transmuted once more into the material of holiness, just as we town-dwellers have to fling our disease-breeding corruptions upon the broad heart of mother earth, there to be rendered innocuous and turned from the ministers of death into the sweet and wholesome food of life.

“This hath he done and shall we not adore him?
This shall he do and can we still despair?
Come let us quickly fling ourselves before him,
Cast at his feet the burthen of our care.”

May God give us grace to discern clearly the spiritual beauty and majesty of life, and grant us to be more than conquerors therein through him that loved us and with whom we shall reign in glory world without end.



XI

THE SENSE OF THE ETERNAL

“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” — HABAKKUK III, 17-18.

XI

THE SENSE OF THE ETERNAL

IT has often been pointed out, and quite rightly, that the Old Testament says almost nothing about personal immortality. Most of the interest of the writers seems to be centered on the immortality of the nation, an immortality wholly of this world. Practically no hope is held out of an immortal existence for the individual in the world to come. Here and there we find vague suggestions of it, but nothing more; it is not insisted upon, placed in the foreground of thought, as in the New Testament. It is truly astonishing, when we come to consider the matter from our modern Christian point of view, that a religious life so strong and intense as that of ancient Israel could exist without belief in a post-mortem conscious existence for the individual soul. True, this came later, but it never attained anything like the brightness and joy of the Christian's hope of heaven. The Sheol of Old Testament belief, the underworld, or place of the departed, was never pictured as a desirable condition. It was life on earth that filled the thoughts of the Israelitish people, to

The Sense of the Eternal

the practical exclusion of any other. "For Sheol cannot praise thee, the dead cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day."

How, I say, are we to explain this association of deep religious feeling with indifference or pessimism regarding a future life? Well, I do so on several grounds. In the first place, personality, as we now understand that word, had not emerged in the experience of this people. They thought of themselves as living only in and for the whole community; they could not think of life in any other way; the only personality they knew, if I may so put it, was the personality called Israel, and they believed that Israel could not die. Understand, they did not think of life as leaving off when a man died; the spirit, or essential part of him, went back to God and was somehow breathed forth again in the total life of the nation; a tree does not die because its leaves fall, and to the men of the Old Testament an individual human being was no more than a leaf on the tree of the national life. You will admit, I think, that there was a real and lasting truth in this conception of things, a conception forcibly expressed in the well-known saying in Ecclesiastes: "The dust returns unto the earth as it was, and the spirit unto God who gave it." Life was not thought of as being destroyed at death, but as taking new forms.

The Sense of the Eternal

Another explanation of the fact we are just now discussing is this: These ancient Israelites did not think of human life as we do now as being possible on different planes — a material and a super-material or spiritual. They could not imagine existence at all apart from what we call the physical: to them the whole universe was of one substance, call it what you will. Spirit was the divine breath that animated it. Here again were they not right as far as they went? Have not we moderns made far too much of the distinction between the material and the spiritual? That distinction does not really hold. The universe, visible and invisible, is a garment woven without seam throughout. There may be many planes of existence — “in my Father’s house are many abiding-places” — but there is only one universe and only one substance pervading it in varying modes of manifestation. To the simple piety of these people of thousands of years ago there was no thought of this world and the next, a hither and a yonder, but just of life itself. It did not occur to them to ask whether that life, as individualized in men and women, might continue to find other forms of expression than those which are possible to it on earth. Still they were right; man lives because God lives in him; withdraw the divine spirit and he dies, so far as that one earth-form is concerned, but the essence of it does not die. Their whole idea of the nature of life, you see,

The Sense of the Eternal

was profoundly religious. According to their thought man only lived by and for God, and individuality was not an end in itself, though life in the deepest sense was indestructible.

And this brings me to a third explanation of the reason why the typical Israelite of ancient times was so profoundly religious while caring so little about futurity in human relations. It was because of his sense of the eternal. I hardly know how to describe this, for we live in an age which takes small account of it. But perhaps one might put it this way: it was a feeling or perception that behind all the changing events of life, all its joys and sorrows, all its triumphs and defeats, all its questions of meat and drink, and loss or gain of earthly possessions, was something else in which life most truly consisted, and that something was knowledge of God. Whatever else might go or stay that was always there. I do not know a finer example of it in the Bible than the beautiful passage which forms my text. Just listen to it again. "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." You can feel the power of the testimony, but what on earth can it mean? Does it mean that the speaker knows that God will bring everything

The Sense of the Eternal

right for him and make him prosperous in spite of appearances? Does it mean that he expects to be compensated in this world for all the trouble and disaster through which he has been called upon to pass? There is not a hint of any such thing. What is implied is that he has found something so precious in communion with the living God, something so deep and real and abiding, that he is regardless of the tribulations of the outer man. From this point of view the utterance is truly sublime; it looks behind the things that seem, to the things that are. It shows us a quality of life, an order of experience, which renders us comparatively independent of the vicissitudes of time and sense. I call this the sense of the eternal, and I believe it explains, as nothing else can, the influence exercised by Old Testament religion for so many ages upon races and faiths widely different from those of ancient Israel. This is the secret, this sense of the eternal, this experience of a kind of life worth having for its own sake, but lying deeper down than anything which pertains only to the flesh.

I am deeply conscious of the difficulty of making such a message understood by the present generation in the world to which you and I belong. It may be that amongst my hearers this morning are some to whom it must seem the height of foolishness to say that there is any such thing as a realization of the eternal, so strong and vivid as to render one compara-

The Sense of the Eternal

tively immune to "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." Nevertheless it is true, and I have come here this morning to tell you about it in the hope that it may induce some of you to hold the world more loosely. This is often said to be a materialistic age, and so it is, and I wonder if you all see why it is so. It is because our general tendency is to live on the outside of things. To call it materialistic is not to say that it is altogether soulless or wanting in power or inspiration. It is not; it is in many ways full of hope; the social consciousness is being developed to an extent never known before; justice, brotherhood, freedom, and good-will amongst all nations, are being carried to a higher point than at any previous period. I believe, too, that our materialism in thought and practise is a necessary stage through which we have had to pass in our spiritual evolution, and that we may emerge therefrom all the stronger and richer because of it. But look at the price we are having to pay for the great material advance we are making. You know well enough that the average man of your acquaintance has little time, and perhaps not much inclination, to think about anything that is not immediately concerned with the improvement of our outward condition in this world. The pace is getting faster and faster; we have to work as our forefathers never did, and the strain on brain and nerve is becoming so great that there are not a few authorities

The Sense of the Eternal

who tell us that it cannot be maintained. The output of wealth in the Western world has enormously increased — in fact it has increased at a greater ratio within the last fifty years than in any other fifty of which history has any knowledge — but how much happier are we for it? We do not seem to know how to manage it, so as to make life more livable for all. The poor are no better off than they ever were, or very little; the ordinary existence of the toiler is drab and cheerless, and in all ranks of society the strain of competition is so deeply felt that few or none are altogether free from worry or care. Really, in our intense absorption in life we have somehow forgotten how to live. And look at the kind of man it is making. The typical member of a civilized community today is a person who seems to have lost all capacity for any but utilitarian pursuits; he seldom pauses to ask what life is all about, and when he does the answer is as often as not a confession of inability to solve the riddle. In countries like France and Germany, and in some degree every other country in Christendom, including our own, religion is looked at askance, for the time being, as though it were something of no practical importance, something which has to be left out of account in the serious work of life. But do you not see that we are missing life? This prodigious expenditure of energy is not producing the kind of result which justifies it. We are tearing about

The Sense of the Eternal

on the surface of things, but we are not leaving ourselves opportunity to discover what life itself is for, or whether there is any truer level of experience on which it can be lived. Strip the ordinary man of the furniture of his life, so to speak, the outside things which absorb him day by day, and the probability is he will feel he has no life left.

Will you permit me at this point to give a personal testimony? Ever since I was a little child I have been impressed by the unreality of the material world and the events which are taking place in it. I can well remember, as a boy, the strange feeling I often had that I was not at home in it, that it was unsubstantial — a mirage which might easily disappear — and that in any case the true world was somehow hidden behind it and occasionally shining through. So strong was this feeling that at times one could almost imagine the curtain had been drawn aside and the illusion was gone. In the strenuous activities of later life this feeling lessened, though it never wholly left me, and now it has come back with almost the same intensity as in childhood. At almost any moment one can stand off, as it were, from the succession of experiences through which one is passing and view them as though they were but shadows thrown upon a screen. Can they be much more? And since my spiritual life has deepened and matured somewhat I find myself growing more aloof from the

The Sense of the Eternal

appearances and preoccupations of the visible world and concentrating more and more upon the permanent realities underlying it and the purpose of my being here. Not that I take no account of the present world or tell myself that it does not matter. On the contrary, I feel that it matters far more deeply than at present we are able to realize; that it does not matter in the way it seems to matter; it matters for something else. All that we say or do, feel, think, or know, matters in relation to the eternal and not otherwise. Hence to allow ourselves to be dominated by the things of the passing day, whether sad or joyful, is to lose the true perspective upon life.

And here let me point out something rather remarkable. It is that very often the people who seem to have least reason for calling life good, or seeing God's hand in it, are just the people to whom it seems most full of beautiful meaning. I admit they are rare, but they are to be found, and whenever you come across them you get a benediction. The late Mr. Moody used to tell how, when he was in my country on his great mission in 1874, he was asked to stay a few hours at a certain town through which he had to pass on his journey north, in order to visit a man who had been bed-ridden for years. He did so at some inconvenience, thinking it would be a good action on his part, and that he might be able to bestow some comfort upon the poor sufferer. Never

The Sense of the Eternal

did he get a greater surprise. According to his own testimony he gave nothing, but gained much. God took him there in order that he might learn how little bodily circumstances had to do with the deeper life of the soul. He found a man so crippled that unassisted he could not move, and yet, said Mr. Moody, it seemed as though the gates of heaven were flung wide open in that sick-room and legions of angels were passing to and fro. The glory of the Shekinah was present. The sick man's heart was filled with a rapture which transfigured him; it shone from his face; it exalted his whole being. He was so near in spirit to the supernal realities that he scarcely felt or knew his bodily limitations. I could give something of the same testimony myself. My ministry has brought me into contact, through correspondence and otherwise, with people who have passed through nearly every imaginable trouble but have lived so close to God that the changes in their outward circumstances have had no power to rob them of their peace. I admit that generally they have had to pass through hell, as it were, in order to get to that, but once they have got it nothing external has ever seemed to matter much. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself seems to have had to come to it along a fiery pathway, notwithstanding the transcendent greatness of his spiritual nature. "These things have I spoken unto you that in Me ye may have peace; in the world ye shall

The Sense of the Eternal

have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." The other night I happened to witness a most curious phenomenon. It was a bright moonlight, and looking up into the firmament I could see one beautiful star, shining steady and clear. But the night was stormy and the face of the sky was covered with hurrying clouds; and a strange thing was — a thing I do not remember ever having noticed before — that through the opening in the clouds which were being driven from east to west I could see other clouds above them, which were being driven from west to east; apparently there were two strong currents of air moving in exactly opposite directions, creating and carrying large masses of vapor along with them as they went. The total effect was most striking, especially as from time to time those banks of clouds parted for a moment in their tempestuous rush and revealed the star behind them shining with a perfectly wonderful, motionless beauty, reflecting the light of the hidden sun. Is not the spiritual experience I have been describing something like this? Over the surface of the soul, over all that constitutes the outer man, conflicting currents of evil may play at their pleasure, but behind and beneath them, all the time, shines with undimmed luster the star of faith that reflects the light of eternal love.

I feel this morning that I would like to press home this message in the form of a direct appeal

The Sense of the Eternal

to all of you that are gathered here. The probabilities are that you are all needing it. It may be — nay, must be — that you already have in some degree the sense of the eternal or you would not feel any interest in being here. You have not come to hear a lecture on morals nor do you want to listen to my views on the present English political crisis. You are here, I take it, because of the yearning of which you are conscious, or the satisfaction of a deep spiritual instinct; you want to be able to rest more completely in Him who changeth not. But what a world you have come out of! and what varied experiences commingle here! Perhaps some of you are feeling that life is a sort of ghastly joke, so topsy-turvy have things become, so differently have they turned out from what you ever thought. You are very lonely, it may be, and the older you become the lonelier. Yours may be the kind of nature that gives itself in full confidence to very few, and it is through those few that you reach out to the rest of the world. Well, what has happened? I am afraid you have been finding that it is never well to make your soul's good dependent upon the ministrations of some other human being. I have heard people say, for instance, that if I were to disappoint them, or falsify the notion they have formed of my character, they would never trust a preacher again. Why not? No one has any business to say any such thing. Human consistency is a poor thing to

The Sense of the Eternal

lean upon, at the best; it is a broken reed which may pierce the hand that presses on it. You ought to be so living with God that, while you rejoice in every fresh manifestation of his goodness to you through human hearts and hands, you do not feel impoverished or embittered when these are withdrawn. Your own heart ought to be as fresh and sweet towards human nature when it fails you as when it caresses you. I admit it is difficult, but until you have learned it you have not learned the secret of true living. Death or misfortune may have stripped you of some of your fairest possessions today. You may have been fighting all your life and making little or no headway against the odds which beset you at the beginning; your labor may have failed; your little earthly estate may be just as barren as ever. Or you may have become suddenly impoverished. Without warning everything has gone wrong. Your own familiar friend in whom you trusted has lifted up his heel against you and become your adversary. You may be so situated that you know it is not the faintest use trying to right yourself in the esteem of the little world you live in; you may just as well hold your tongue. In your haste you are perhaps ready with the accusation that all men are liars. But you are wrong; they are not, not even those who for the moment have done you hurt and helped to attenuate your life. They do not see, and that is all there is to be said. You

The Sense of the Eternal

are probably the same yourself. Everyone sees life only from his particular point of view, which never is, and never could be, his neighbor's. One of the most staggering things in our common experience is the seeming cruelty of good people. Again and again I have noticed kind-hearted folk rejoicing with an almost fiendish exultation when disaster overtook the plans of someone to whom they were opposed. Why? Simply because they could not see into the other man's suffering soul, and were absolutely unable to change places with him in imagination. I think it would be safe to say that all the cruelty in the world is due to this cause, this inability to see with each other's eyes and feel with each other's hearts.

But none of these things are life itself. Life consists in knowing God, and loving with his love. Any experience which helps us to do that is good; anything that hinders us from doing it is bad.

“Measure thy life by loss instead of gain,
Not by the wine drunk, but by the wine poured forth;
For love's strength standeth in love's sacrifice,
And he who suffers most hath most to give.”

I want you to believe, and I think you will believe, that in that which most truly constitutes your life you can be independent of the world while continuing to feel kindly towards it and to serve it with all your might. “These things,” said the Master, “have I spoken unto

The Sense of the Eternal

you that my joy might be in you and that your joy may be full." Wonderful words, spoken in the very shadow of Calvary! The person credited with uttering them, one who spake as never man spake, was on the point of losing everything, even the loyalty of those to whom they were spoken, and he knew it. But they were true nevertheless. There is a joy of the Lord which the world can neither give nor take away, but it only becomes ours as we, on our part, become willing to surrender the world and the world's good and give ourselves utterly into the hands of God.

XII

THE POOR IN SPIRIT

“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” — MATT. V, 3.

XII

THE POOR IN SPIRIT

IT has been suggested by some New Testament critics that this aphorism is an example of the toning-down process which went on under ecclesiastical influence after the first enthusiasm of early Christianity was past. In Luke's version of the Master's teaching this particular Beatitude is expressed with altogether different emphasis. The rendering is, "Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God." The discrepancy is manifest. Which of the two is correct? For it is obvious that they cannot both be an accurate report of the original saying as it came from the lips of Jesus — or so it would seem. The inference therefore is, according to the view I have just mentioned, that Luke's is the primitive form of the epigram, and that Matthew deliberately modified it to suit changing circumstances. When I say "Matthew" of course I mean the person or persons to whom we owe the first Gospel as it now stands in the New Testament canon. As you know, it has been called the ecclesiastical gospel because it exhibits so many

The Poor in Spirit

traces of ecclesiastical modes of thought in its composition; evidently by the time it came to be written the organization of the Christian church was fairly well advanced. In Luke, on the contrary, not much interest is shown in the church as such. All the evangelist's solicitude is reserved for the poor and unprivileged, the flotsam and jetsam of society, and he eagerly seizes hold of every traditional word of the Master which indicates that he had a special compassion for these, as indeed no doubt he had. So, says the critic, it is more than probable that Luke's version comes nearer to the original than Matthew's. In the latter we have some suggestion of the spirit of compromise. Where Luke speaks about the poor, Matthew has the "poor in spirit." Where Luke promises abundance to those that hunger, Matthew says those "that hunger and thirst after righteousness." Luke has nothing but woes for the rich, but evidently Matthew has no special hostility to the privileged orders as such. But did Jesus speak like Matthew, or like Luke?

This is a question of some importance for a true understanding of our text, and I can only say in answer that there seems good ground for believing that the Master uttered both sayings substantially as they stand. Most of you, I daresay, are aware that, in the opinion of eminent New Testament authorities, there is behind both the first and third Gospels an earlier compendium of the sayings of Jesus, which

The Poor in Spirit

is probably the oldest document in the New Testament. This primitive literary source is technically referred to by scholars as Q. And there is one very remarkable thing about this Q. It is that it is almost entirely pure spiritual teaching, without local allusions or nationalistic bias of any kind. You can practically get at this document for yourself by the simple process of eliminating from the first and third Gospels all that is peculiar to either of them, together with all that is common to them and Mark. What remains — that is, the sayings of Jesus which in substance are reported by Matthew and Luke only — constitutes Q. Let me say again that the most impressive thing about this little body of teaching, this rock bottom of Christianity as Jesus himself gave it to us, is its freedom from all admixture of hard or repellent elements, and its superiority to the limitations of thought which abound throughout the rest of the New Testament. No greater testimony to the unique eminence of the Master could well be furnished. It demonstrates that the nearer we get to Jesus himself, the purer and more beautiful is the stream of the divine revelations of which he was the fountain head.

Now if the supposition be correct which some experts advance, that Q is really the document referred to in early Christian tradition as having been composed of notes of the sayings of Jesus, written in Aramaic by Matthew the pub-

The Poor in Spirit

lican, the fact throws a good deal of light upon the particular sentence we are considering this morning. The original Q may have contained both versions of it because Jesus uttered both. The late Professor A. B. Bruce said that the Sermon on the Mount ought preferably to be called the Teaching on the Hill. It was not all spoken on one occasion. Jesus and his disciples stayed on the mountain-top here referred to for a long time, while he carefully taught them his idea of the true nature of the long-expected Kingdom of God. Each Beatitude probably formed the subject of one day's discourse; and when we remember the kind of audience the Master had gathered round him, taking into account also the fact that he was a teacher of marvelous skill and sympathetic insight, we can see something of how he must have proceeded in his opening lesson. Looking round upon the little company of toilers he would begin as Luke says by declaring, "Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." You have not been taught to think this; you have not been expecting the Kingdom to belong primarily to you; but so it is. You do not need to look far and wide; the Kingdom of God begins with the consciousness of God's presence and God's rule in the human heart; and that consciousness only comes to him who is humble, simple, sincere, compassionate towards his fellows, ambitious for nothing save to live in peace and good-will with man and

The Poor in Spirit

God. Persons of this spirit are more usually found among those who have little or nothing to lose than those who are hampered by an abundance of this world's goods, and liable to be deceived by the false values they create. It is a spirit therefore which comes more easily to a poor man than to a rich man. Then blessed be that man who, whether he be poor or rich, can keep the spirit which is most natural to a poor man, for he is near to the central source of all goodness and joy. "Blessed are the poor *in spirit*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

As I say, I think this is most likely to have been the way in which Jesus unfolded to his lowly hearers his thought on this great theme. It is just what we might expect of him. He would arrest the attention of those who had been accustomed to poverty all their lives, by telling them that it was they rather than the rich who were close to the spiritual goal, near to the heart eternal. And then he would go on to show what he meant by saying so. He would begin with Luke's version of our text and end with Matthew's.

To be poor in spirit is thus a very different thing from being poor-spirited, and does not necessarily mean being poor in substance either. It means getting free from the dominion of all that tends to distort one's vision in regard to the business of living. And here let me say emphatically that, so far as my observation

The Poor in Spirit

goes, material wealth is only one of such dangerous deflecting influences in human experience, and perhaps not the most powerful. Intellectual pride, or even excessive trust in intellectual processes, as a guide to truth, is a more fatal bar to spiritual progress than the holding of high position or an exceptionally large share of material good. A still greater foe to the soul's welfare, because a subtler deceiver, is moral self-complacency; anything that encourages a man to think highly of himself, to account himself meritorious, or to put a barrier between himself and any one else in the world, in such a way as to constitute that person his inferior, is a thing that needs to be carefully guarded against. Blessed is he over whom such allurements have no power and who cannot be deceived by their glamour. Anything unreal in life, anything which prevents a human being from seeing himself as he really is, is an evil to be resisted and overcome. "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."

For the purpose of illustrating this general statement let me call your attention to one or two types of character and experience such as you can easily come across any day, and which may quite probably be represented in this church at this moment. Have you ever noticed how the possession of even a small amount of power tends to demoralize its possessor and to render him incapable of seeing himself apart from all that is merely adventitious and exter-

The Poor in Spirit

nal in relation to his personality? And have you never witnessed the extraordinary effect which a change of circumstances will sometimes produce in a person's self-esteem, as well as in the opinion of the world concerning him? See what material success will do for a man's very look, his whole demeanor, his attitude to you, and the assumption of what he expects from you. He is a strong man indeed — strong in the spiritual sense — who is not in the least affected by the station he occupies in life, but remains exactly the same under all vicissitudes of fortune. When we come to think of it, why should any man be entitled to special deference on account of the greatness of his possessions? Why should he look for it? Why should more respect be shown to him than to the humblest person in his employ who is straight and true and pays his way? It is an utterly false standard of excellence which introduces any such mode of looking at things. And it is no corrective to it to be rude all round. What many people seem to desire nowadays is that no respect or courtesy should be shown to anyone; that is their idea of democracy. If it were ever to become universal I think I should want to get transferred to some region where civilization was unknown. Surely the truer ideal is to learn to discern rightly what is worthy of reverence and then accord it without stint. Not to multiply words, the point is that nearly everybody finds it exceedingly

The Poor in Spirit

difficult, if not impossible, to consider a man's intrinsic worth, apart from the accidents of material endowment and social standing; we can scarcely dissociate what he is from what he has. And if this be true of the onlooker it must be even truer of the man himself. It is useless to say that external things do not affect character; they do; and it goes almost without saying that the holder of great possessions must find it harder to see himself as he really is than he would if he were poor. When we come across a case in which it is not so we are generally surprised, and we always think it a matter to be commented upon. "Why," we remark, after holding intercourse with some person of exalted station or enormous wealth, "he was just as simple and unpretentious as though he belonged to the humblest rank of life." Exactly; but that is just the point; you see how naturally you take for granted that he might reasonably have been quite otherwise. The daily papers are continually drawing public attention to the fact that some potentate or other has actually done something polite or thoughtful on some particular occasion. Some royal personage has sent to inquire after the health of some obscure individual who happened to get run over in his presence, or some great lady has taken a cripple into her carriage and given him a ride. The very fact that things like these, which are being done every day and hour by the poor for

The Poor in Spirit

the poor, should be considered extraordinary in the rich — so extraordinary as to evoke all kinds of sycophantic comments — only shows how absolutely right Jesus was when he exclaimed, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God!” It is hard for them; the conditions under which they live tend to distort their spiritual vision and to induce them to put a false estimate upon their own value and importance in relation to life as a whole.

But, as I said a few minutes ago, sheer intellectuality will produce a similar effect upon the soul, with or without external aids. I have seen it do it, and so have you, though perhaps you may not have thought of it as having been deprecated by our Lord Jesus Christ. When you are in the society of some excessively clever person, whom perhaps you regard with a sort of awe — or if you do not, it may be only because you are a conceited, ignorant boor and think you are very clever yourself — do you never feel that there are some things in life which that wonderfully cultivated intellect may know nothing about? “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and understanding and hast revealed them unto babes.” I have often been conscious of this feeling when in the presence of people for whose brilliance of mind and vast stores of learning one had the greatest respect — even doctors of

The Poor in Spirit

divinity, real ones, not the sham variety. There seems to be something in the very nature of great intellectual development which constitutes it a danger to the soul. Now please do not understand me to say that intelligence and culture are to be deplored; they are not; I believe the exact opposite; God does not give us faculties in order that we may waste them, and therefore intellectual power is as divine a gift as anything else in our experience. I am glad to admit, too, that some of the simplest, kindest, and most modest people I have ever known have belonged to the company of the intellectually great. But on the whole it really does seem that intellectuality is a danger to spirituality, and may grow at its expense unless a careful watch is kept upon the state of the soul. Take any church where the intellectual is put first, and see how cold, how unhelpful, how comparatively powerless it is in changing lives and lifting men towards better things. It is fatal to any religious community to mistake the intellectual for the spiritual or to act as though they were identical. I do not know that anyone can explain just why it is that high intellectual development is apt to starve the soul; but the nearest approach one can make to an explanation is that the human mind is after all only an instrument, and a comparatively imperfect instrument, too, of the true self. It is no more than an instrument; it should never be confounded with the mysterious entity that

The Poor in Spirit

makes use of it. On the other hand, spirituality springs from intuition, from subjective processes, lofty feelings, habits of devotion, consecration, self-discipline. These bring their reward in the production of an experience which does not in the least depend upon high intelligence or the acquirement of vast quantities of knowledge. Very simple people can be, and often are, wiser in the things of the spirit, and in that knowledge of God which is life eternal, than some of their fellows who surpass them immeasurably in the magnitude of their attainments on the purely intellectual plane. We may thank God it is so, or not many would find entrance to the kingdom of heaven. It is only when the intellectual giant sees himself to be a little child in relation to spiritual truth, and demeans himself accordingly, that the gates of the kingdom of heaven open before him. He must be poor in spirit, however great on the plane of human reason, or he will inevitably be shut outside and not even know what he has missed.

There is little that I need say about that third hindrance to spiritual progress which I also indicated a little while back; I mean the kind or quality of moral development which is characterized by a certain hardness or self-approval very far removed from true humility of heart. If anyone ever becomes dominated by this view of himself and his relations to life it is usually difficult indeed to make him

The Poor in Spirit

see how gross, unlovely, and deceitful is the ideal he has formed. Some of the people who least dream that there is anything pharisaic about them, or that they could rightly be classed for a moment with those New Testament characters whom Jesus condemned most scathingly, are of this order. They may be very worthy folk, unsparing in their dealings with themselves, truthful, honorable, strong, filled with the desire to be of service in the world. But unfortunately, usually without being more than half conscious of it, they are too apt to arrogate to themselves the right to be a standard of excellence for others. They are so prepared to do good in their own particular way that it never occurs to them that the people they desire to influence towards better living may already be nearer the Kingdom of God than they themselves are. Their self-complacency blinds them to the facts; they would be outraged by the suggestion that they are not in God's confidence so to speak. Are they not patterns of rectitude? Are they not setting a good example to all around them? Are they not zealous for every good cause and most self-sacrificing in their efforts to promote it? Yes, just so; but their habitual assumption of being all this is the very thing that is rendering them impervious to the finer workings of the Spirit of God. "Verily I say unto you," said the Master, "the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before you."

The Poor in Spirit

Ah, my friends, to be poor in spirit is not such an easy matter! It is not only the highly-placed in this world who are in danger of missing the blessedness it brings. We may any of us miss it by admitting to our hearts anything that encourages our egoism, in contrast to the lowly simplicity of Christ. Oh, pray for a right spirit, the spirit of humility and charity, the spirit that discerns unerringly between what is true and false in one's own attitude to life, the spirit of him who, "though he was rich yet for our sakes became poor that we through his poverty might be rich." For only as we are possessed of this spirit can God reveal himself to our aspiring souls. .

XIII
OUR ETERNAL GLORY

“The glory which I had with thee before the world was.” — JOHN XVII, 5.

XIII

OUR ETERNAL GLORY

ACCORDING to the best critical opinion this whole chapter, beautiful as it is, is not so likely to be an exact report of the words of Jesus as are the sententious sayings preserved for us in the three earlier Gospels. There is a striking dissimilarity in form to begin with, and there is considerable difference in thought, likewise. Furthermore it is improbable that any person, however gifted, could remember so long a discourse as this, word for word, so as to be able to write it down exactly as it came from the Master's lips, and this consideration acquires additional force when we remember that St. John's Gospel came into existence much later than the others. The question therefore at once suggests itself, Are we here listening to what Jesus actually thought and said about himself or to what the Church of the sub-apostolic age had come to think about him? There are not a few expert New Testament scholars, even among the unimpeachably orthodox, who believe the latter; they hold that we have here, especially in the petition which forms my text, a highly developed consciousness of

Our Eternal Glory

the divine status of our Lord Jesus Christ such as the apostles themselves were quite incapable of previous to his death and resurrection. I cannot, however, wholly endorse this view. I admit that as this chapter stands it can hardly be a verbally exact reproduction of the Master's valedictory prayer in the upper room on the night of his arrest; but the occasion was so solemn, and the crisis so great, that something of the intense feeling in the heart of Jesus, concerning the transcendent significance of what was taking place, must have communicated itself to those about him. We may be sure that if ever there was a moment when his consciousness of his own divine origin shone forth in majesty it would be just then. The end of his earthly journey was in sight; his toils were all but over; his vocation was about to be consummated in the awful experience of Calvary; but after that what remained but to enter upon the full and unclouded realization of the eternal glory? "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." What more likely than that, in such an exalted hour, Jesus' conviction of his own timeless fellowship with God, the super-earthly quality of his being, should assert itself in a way that those for whom he prayed would never forget? I care much less about the actual words in which

Our Eternal Glory

that conviction is here expressed than I do about the fact that it could not fail to make itself felt under the conditions indicated, if he had it at all.

But the great question before us this morning is as to what it was that Jesus thought or knew about himself in relation to the eternal. This is really the question of the hour in the religious world, and most of the conflict of opinion is concerned with it directly or indirectly. The traditional Christian view of the subject is, as I need not tell you, that the Christ of Christian faith is eternal and uncreate, and that this Christ or only-begotten Son of God has become manifest to the world as Jesus. This is the New Testament view, too, explicitly set forth in the epistles, and by implication in such gospel passages as my text. But it is generally understood that ordinary humanity is in quite a different category. We are not eternal and uncreate, according to the prevailing doctrine at present; a few years ago we did not exist; we were brought into being by a direct creative act of God, and though we shall go on to all eternity we are not eternal as Christ is eternal, for we had a beginning and he had none. Now what I want to ask is whether this is true and whether it really represents what Jesus believed about himself on the one hand and us on the other. For it is plain to the meanest intelligence that if this distinction between his origin and ours does indeed hold good then

Our Eternal Glory

certainly he is something which cannot properly be called human, despite the fact that he wore a human body for a few short years. Nor is the difference between him and us a small one; it is so immense that no words can adequately describe it. It is useless to try to disguise this fact. If Jesus is eternal and uncreate and you are not, and if he knew this during his earthly ministry, it stands to reason that he is no more human in the sense that you are human than the planet Jupiter is human. He never could look at life in the same way as you do, nor know its problems as you have to know them; he belongs to another order and lives on another plane.

Let me say at once then, before I utter another sentence, that I think I see pretty plainly where the present struggle of Christian thought is going to issue. People cannot remain content to think of Jesus as *un-human* — for that is what it amounts to — but neither will they want to say or believe anything which makes him something less than Christian experience has always affirmed him to be. In a word, he must always be to us the God-man, the perfect manifestation, in terms of a single personal humanity, of that which God himself essentially is. We must not say or do anything which would tend to lower the status of Jesus in the estimation of mankind. That would be to give us a poorer, weaker gospel. We want to think of him, and ought to think of him, as being at least equal to

Our Eternal Glory

the highest that Christian experience has ever affirmed of him; we must never go back on that, for if we do we shall not only lose something unspeakably beautiful and precious, but we shall be turning our back on the process of divine revelation itself. God does not do things that way; it would not be in accordance with the nature of truth that he should. He does not give us a blessing which we afterwards find out to be smaller than we thought it at first. If this were the way he worked, human lot would be sadder and more tragical than it is. But he does not; he does the exact reverse; any good that God bestows grows richer with our experience of it, it never grows poorer; any truth he reveals is seen to be larger as we gain closer acquaintance with it, it never grows less. This is a statement which I cannot prove, but I think most of you will agree that it does not need proof; if it be not true, then there is nothing reliable on earth or heaven. It is because I hold this so firmly that, as I have already said, I do not believe that the thought of the future is in the least likely to dislodge Jesus from the position he has held in the devotion of Christendom for nineteen hundred years, as the one being in whom divinity and humanity were perfectly blended, or rather the one being in whom divinity and humanity were completely realized as one.

But the matter cannot stop there. To say as much as this compels us to say more. If in

Our Eternal Glory

Jesus divinity and humanity were not two things, but one, then all we can say is that humanity is divinity self-limited. And if the divine and the eternal imply each other, if that which is divine is that which is uncreate, which never needed a beginning and will never have an end, then there must be something in every human being which can only be thus described. Please take note of this, for it is the most important thing I have said this morning. This is the great issue which is before us today. It is not the status of Jesus which is really in question, but our own; and the result cannot be doubtful; it will not be to drag Jesus down, but to lift humanity up. I venture to prophesy that in a few generations this will be seen to be the greatest thing that the gospel of Jesus has given to the world, this discovery that the spirit of man, the changeless reality, hidden within both body and soul, is eternal and uncreate — an out-breathing, as it were, of the very being of God himself.

“Never the spirit was born, the spirit shall cease to be
never;

Never was time it was not, end and beginning are
dreams;

Birthless, and deathless, and changeless remaineth the
spirit for ever:

Death hath not touched it at all, dead though the house
of it seems.”

I repeat that I believe this to be the greatest thing that Jesus brought to earth, this revela-

Our Eternal Glory

tion of what we are. By showing us what human life could become, he has shown us what it already is. "Become what you are," said one of the Fathers of the Church, and in so saying epitomized the whole mystery of redemption. We could not rise to God if we had not within us that which is of God to begin with. Looking upon Jesus we can say, From that we came and unto that we shall return. I believe Jesus knew this; there are indications in his recorded words that he knew it; his very use of the phrase "Your Father which is in heaven" implies it. Revealing in himself the eternal and uncreate, he has revealed it in all mankind.

There are many difficulties surrounding this subject to which our present knowledge is unequal, but they are small compared with the difficulties attending any lesser view of our relationship to God. We are, so to speak, a portion of the eternal divine substance, detached from its source (or feeling itself to be such), wrapped up in matter and put to sleep, rendered unconscious of its glorious origin, limited in a thousand ways, and then bidden to evolve towards that from which it came. Jesus has shown us what that is and how to get to it. He is himself the way, the truth, and the life. What he is, is the way home for us; he is the truth about both our being and God's; and he is the life which we must live and shall live when we have fully realized ourselves in

Our Eternal Glory

relation to all that is changeless and abiding. I admit that when one reflects upon the enormous wickedness of human nature in some of its developments it seems almost impossible to take such a high view of its origin and destiny as this. There is nothing much more saddening than a study of the cruelties and bestialities of human history. Reading the other day a few chapters in Motley's "Rise of the Dutch Republic," I made the discovery that either I must have been less sensitive when I read that book as a boy or I could not have taken in at that time the long story it had to tell of the tortures, murders, treacheries, and almost incredible obscenities of Spanish rule in Flanders in the sixteenth century. It is hard to believe that such devils had ever existed as Philip of Spain and his servant the Duke of Alva, not to speak of the horde of brutes and scoundrels who carried out their orders. To be plunged into that atmosphere gave me for the moment a sort of shock. One almost wondered whether even a moderately optimistic estimate of human nature and its possibilities were not a foolish dream. A few days earlier someone had been describing to me from first-hand evidence some of the horrors of the White Slave Traffic as carried on at such a sink of iniquity as Port Said. The report was unprintable. Vile, unspeakably vile, loathsome beyond imagination, foul and sickening, were the details of what human nature was

Our Eternal Glory

capable of under such conditions. It seems almost blasphemy even to think of such things in the same breath with Jesus, let alone declare that there is a way from such filthy depths of degradation to the sublime height on which he dwells, or that the souls which thus wallow in the mire of sensuality are from the same divine source as he. But there is no help for it; I must say it; to say any other is to bring an accusation against God to which there is no defense. For, do what you will, the ultimate responsibility for all that is most dreadful in human experience, as well as for all that is most beautiful, must rest with him. For "he it is that hath made us and not we ourselves"; and all the instincts of our nature, the perverse gratification of which is sin, must be of his implanting. And, as a modern essayist tellingly says, "The lesson of science is that man is slowly struggling upwards out of his bestial inheritance into purity and light; and thus if a man can inherit evil from evil progenitors by the law of God, he is not a free agent in the matter." No, that is just it. If we were absolutely free we should know neither temptation nor sin; it is just because we are not free, or only partially free, that we have to know both. The conditions of our life in the body are such that we are to some extent under compulsion all the time. We can only feel, think, and know as the body allows us to feel, think, and know; our consciousness of

Our Eternal Glory

ourselves and of life as a whole is only what the body permits. Mark, we cannot too carefully emphasize the fact, however, that we are not the helpless victims of the body. There is a divine voice within us, the voice of conscience, which is never silent and which tells us we ought to choose and follow the higher whenever desire comes into conflict with what we have learned to call duty. We cannot escape the struggle; indeed we are here on earth that we may realize our divinity by means of that struggle; it is the very reason why there is an earthly life at all; but never let us ignore the fact that, however great the odds against us at any time, the whole infinitude of God is behind every effort of the upward striving soul.

Perhaps the nearest analogy that one could find wherewith to describe our present experience in relation to our true eternal being is that of a dream; in fact one of the commonest of poetic figures is that in which human life on earth is referred to as a dream.

“ ’Tis plain
In this world’s uncertain gleam,
That to live is but to dream.”

You all know how in dreams you are capable of things from which you would shrink in horror when awake; you can callously commit murder or other crimes utterly foreign to your normal self; your moral faculties seem to have

Our Eternal Glory

become distorted or thrust out of your consciousness in your sleep. Much the same applies to the ravings of delirium when one is in the grip of disease; your normal consciousness is displaced; it cannot get through the hampering limitations of the flesh for the time being. Up to a point the same remark would hold good of all physical disabilities. When you are ill your judgment is apt to be clouded; when vitality is low one does not generally take a hopeful view of life and one's place therein; as people get older, and the body responds more slowly to the demands of the spirit, they are apt to shrivel somewhat, not only in their intellectual, but to some extent in their moral capacities too. One often hears the sad confession made that as a loved one becomes physically infirm he somehow becomes more trying too, less admirable, less noble and magnanimous, there seems to be less of him. Thank God it is not always so, but it is so often enough to illustrate the general truth of what I say; the spirit is dependent for its expression in a very large degree upon its body. I will even go further and say upon its soul, for the soul is the spirit's vehicle as truly as the body, and the larger it grows the fuller is the manifestation it affords of the spirit eternal and divine.

In conclusion, then, let me press upon your acceptance this wonderful truth of our being as revealed in Jesus. Surely you will all admit

Our Eternal Glory

that it is good news, that it ought to be true, and that it is something to be glad about? Jesus was and is the Christ eternal; Jesus is not one being and the Christ another; but if even Jesus on earth was limited by the flesh so that he was unable to retain a full consciousness of what he was and whence he came — and there is abundant evidence in the Gospels that it was so — is it strange that it should be so with us likewise? And is it not a glorious thing to think that that which he is we shall some day be? Is not that the very thing he came to show us? Are we not, like him, the offspring of the eternal, and in him shall attain to the glory which he had with the Father before the world was?

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”

XIV

**THE INTRUSION OF THE
TRANSCENDENTAL**

“Thou shalt . . . bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest.” — LUKE I, 31-32.

XIV

THE INTRUSION OF THE TRANSCENDENTAL

THE beautiful stories contained in the first two chapters of St. Luke's Gospel have rightly been called the poetry of the Nativity. If we begin to criticize and analyze them as statements of historical fact we are met at once with insuperable difficulties, for they do not lend themselves to matter-of-fact treatment. You might as well try to bottle a sunset or weigh an oratorio with a pair of scales. But to call them poetry is not to say that they are untrue; on the contrary, poetry may be truer than prose, for it deals with emotions and experiences too subtle to be expressed in the language of literal and exact statement. Certainly it is so with these nativity stories. They take us into a transcendental world, or rather they bring the transcendental world into ours with a sweet suggestiveness and elevation of feeling unsurpassed of their kind. I love these stories, and so do you. To reject them as untrue would be a most muddle-headed proceeding. They are true, but their truth consists in being the vehicles of something high and

Intrusion of the Transcendental

holy, something so far above the ordinary level of our thoughts and feelings that we have no category for it. The incident referred to in my test is perhaps the most impressive of the series. Here we have a messenger from another world making to a Jewish village maiden the formal announcement that she is to become the mother of a son who will have an immeasurable influence for good upon the world, and who will stand to God in a relationship so close that in time to come he will be spoken of, not only as her child, but in a special way the Son of the Most High. With the exception of representations of the Madonna and Child, and the Crucifixion, no subject has been so frequently depicted in sacred art as this, though probably no subject has ever been treated in such a variety of ways; evidently great artists have generally thought of it as not belonging only, or mainly, to the region of the material and workaday world.

But did it ever happen? Yes, it probably did, though whether we have the precise details here is another matter. What happened was far more wonderful than even Luke allows for, though it is plain to be seen that his appreciation of the mystery and sacredness of it all is as great as anything could possibly be; that is why he has told the story in such a way as to make every reader feel that the heralding of the birth of Jesus was an event in which heaven came very near to earth and opened its doors wide.

Intrusion of the Transcendental

Permit me a digression here. I will return to the main point in a moment or two, but I wish to say something which may help to facilitate our approach to it. It is this: I feel increasingly distrustful — I was going to say intolerant — of the merely rationalistic temper in religion. It leads nowhere; it does not help; it does not lift the soul. To say this is by no means to fling oneself into the arms of obscurantism; in deprecating reliance on rationalistic methods in the cultivation of our religious life I am not commending irrationalism — quite the opposite in fact. To flout or repress the intellect amounts in the long run to spiritual suicide; but surely the widest intellectual freedom is compatible with a clear recognition of the truth that religion is essentially super-rational; it is the commerce of the soul with the transcendental, a commerce whose experiences can never be wholly translated into the language of the objective mind. We may as well admit this or we shall never get far in the things of the soul. As I once heard Dr. Parker say, “Where reason flutters faith flies”; and by faith I have no doubt he meant, not a blind superstitious acceptance of certain propositions, but the intuitive faculty whereby man relates himself to that which is beyond the things of time and sense.

Now, unfortunately, owing to the abominations of the Church of Rome in the centuries preceding the Reformation, you and I have

Intrusion of the Transcendental

been brought up in a mental atmosphere which is exceedingly suspicious of what is ordinarily called the supernatural. Properly speaking, there is no supernatural; but you all know what I mean. We may believe the Bible miracles, or we may be so imbued with the critical spirit that we reject them, but we are not at all disposed to believe in the credibility of anything outside the range of our normal sense experience. To be sure we admit without question the marvels laid bare by modern science, such as the Röntgen rays or wireless telegraphy. But even here, as a rule, the pioneer generally has to struggle a long time before his discoveries obtain recognition. Very frequently, indeed more frequently than not, the quack precedes the orthodox discoverer; hypnotism, for instance, was at one time scouted and ridiculed by the whole medical profession and the scientific world in general; today it is a recognized force in therapeutics. Yesterday telepathy and mental healing were classed among the delusions of the neurotic; tomorrow they will have taken their place among the universally accepted facts concerning our mysterious and complex human organization. I suppose there are still some people who would laugh at the theory of the subconscious mind and remain inflexibly convinced that their own personality is bounded by their immediate consciousness of it; but the facts are proving too much for them; psychological

Intrusion of the Transcendental

investigation is forcing us to the conclusion, whether we like it or not, that a man's consciousness of his own being at any time is very small compared with what he really is, and that to the region of the sub-conscious we must refer practically everything that is most truly characteristic of him, including the springs of his religious experience. Still, we might be compelled to admit all this without getting outside the operation of physical law — if that be an admissible term. We might say that every discovery, so far, in the region of the supernormal, no matter how wonderful, is yet confined to the purely material plane, and that we have not been brought into contact with any higher world or any higher order of being than ourselves. Now I firmly believe, and venture to prophesy, that this habit of mind, this all but invincible prejudice of that average man of today, will be broken down, and perhaps before very long too, perhaps within the lifetime of most of us.

I hope you see what I am trying to state. It is that the generation to which you and I belong, and those immediately preceding it, have been so accustomed to confine their interests to the material world, have been so shut up to the contemplation of the mundane, that they instinctively distrust everything that transcends those categories. Thus when we read of the signs and wonders which people trained under medieval Catholicism believed

Intrusion of the Transcendental

to be of everyday occurrence, we at once put them down as gross and silly superstitions.

Few of us ever dream of taking them seriously; the great majority of us are absolutely incapable of imagining ourselves into the mental atmosphere in which such things were deemed possible. One of my occasional recreations is to dip into such a book as Froissart's *Chronicles*, or Joinville's *Memoirs*, or some monkish writer of the Middle Ages; it takes one right away into another world utterly different from that in which we live. This is in itself a source of refreshment; but often and often I pause and smile as I think what an enormous contrast there is between such a character as, say, Louis IX — St. Louis of France — and the average member of the Stock Exchange at the present day, in general outlook upon life. And yet which is the higher? The advantage is not all on the side of the stockbroker. St. Louis lived, or so he thought, in habitual intercourse with invisible beings, saints and angels, and in a world which was continually being acted upon from the unseen — in fact he believed that unseen powers had far more to do with the shaping of his life than had the people whom he saw around him in the flesh. Was he wholly wrong? And was he the worse or the smaller man for extending his perspective beyond the horizon of things material? I do not think so; and, notwithstanding the evils wrought by unreasoning superstition in

Intrusion of the Transcendental

the hands of an unscrupulous priesthood, I am sure we shall have to recover that old-time consciousness of the nearness and activity of the invisible world. I believe the signs of the times are pointing in that direction, and when we get to it we shall understand a great deal that is now puzzling or obscure in the New Testament narratives which are the basis of our faith in the human, personal, yet gloriously divine Christ.

Now let us come back to the point whence we made this excursion. The true explanation of such a passage as my text is that everything great and good, which becomes the common possession of mankind, every special incoming of God into human experience, is prepared in the unseen before it appears in the seen. This sounds a trite observation, but wait a moment. Granted that there is a transcendental world, a world of eternal blessedness and perfection — a fact which my experience no more permits me to doubt than to doubt my own existence — it is in the highest degree probable, nay, inevitable, that everything worth calling a divine advent, every spiritual uplift which our sunken race receives, is celebrated with joy in heaven before we know anything of it on earth. It is known on that side, and known for what it is, long ere the moment comes for its material manifestation. Do you not see then that such a stupendous event as the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ must have been acclaimed in

Intrusion of the Transcendental

glory when it was begun, and watched all through its course with close and reverent interest by the host of heaven? Angels did indeed sing around the cradle of the holy child, though perhaps their sweetest song no mortal ear could hear; angels did minister to him as he lay depleted after his lonely grapple with the tempter in the wilderness, though no mortal eye could behold them; yes, and in dark Gethsemane itself they wiped the blood-drops from his brow, though even he could not feel them near in that awful hour of dereliction and woe. Such things are not merely pious tradition but literal fact.

And do you think it possible, granting this to be the case, that the woman worthy to be the mother of so august a being, a being destined to change the whole face of human history, could have been left altogether without some intimation beforehand as to the greatness of the privilege that was hers? No one can say with positive assurance just how it may have come to her, but come it did. Lesser women than she have seen the veil between earth and heaven parted under similar circumstances. In a recent conversation which I had with Sir Oliver Lodge—and which I rather hesitate to quote, but it points the statement which I have just made—I understood him to say that the conclusion to which he has now come with reference to the interrelation of the visible and invisible worlds makes him

Intrusion of the Transcendental

feel that there must be truth in the numerous traditions in which history abounds, concerning the portents which have preceded the birth of mighty souls into this world and their passing out of it. He does not think that they are all the invention of later generations. I quite agree. No spiritual crisis, no time of new beginnings on earth, can be altogether unaccompanied by some suggestion of the gathering up of forces on the side of heaven.

For who was this Jesus? It can hardly be necessary to tell you over again who I think he was — or, to put it more emphatically, who I am sure he was. He was the focalized expression, in terms of one transcendent human personality, of the Christ eternal who is the very basis of our being. According to the New Testament, "By him, and for him, and unto him are all things, and in him all things consist." He is that aspect of the infinite being of God which has produced the universe of which we form a part; there may be many more aspects of God's infinitude, but this is the one with which we have to do. It is the aspect which philosophers and theologians have for ages called the eternal Son. On the field of time the eternal Son has shown himself as Jesus. Henceforth to think of the Son of God is to think of Jesus. "He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest." And it is in rising into and partaking of his divine sonship that we find ours. "To as many as received

Intrusion of the Transcendental

him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." That was what he came for, that is what he is doing still. As F. W. H. Myers beautifully says in his "Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death": "There is nothing to hinder the reverent faith that though we be all the children of the Most Highest, he came nearer than we, by some space to us immeasurable, to that which is infinitely far. There is nothing to hinder the devout conviction that he of his own act took upon him the form of a servant, and was made flesh for our salvation, foreseeing the earthly travail and the eternal crown." A sentence of that kind is all the more remarkable from the fact that he who wrote it did not come to this conviction along the line of Christian theology but along that of psychological investigation; and I believe I am right in saying that at the time he penned it he was not a professing Christian himself.

But this position leads to another equally important. Such a divine adventure — if I may so put it — as the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, such a sublime acceptance of the limitations of the flesh, meant a certain shutting out of the full consciousness of his true dignity in the eternal world. It is impossible for any one to say what the earthly consciousness of Jesus was concerning himself, but from what we are told in the synoptical gospels it is evident that it was limited in the same way, though

Intrusion of the Transcendental

perhaps not to the same degree, as yours and mine. Luke says in this same chapter that he "increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." I wonder how he must have felt when as a boy he used to climb the hills that encircled the village of Nazareth and contemplated in solitude the mystery of existence. What did he feel about himself when his higher consciousness began to unfold and he became aware of the stirring of unfathomable deeps within his soul? Did no awe ever sweep over him as in his devotions he caught some faint suggestions of a forgotten greatness, a surrendered glory, a world of light and beauty far transcending anything he had ever known in this? Did he ever wonder who he was, ever try vainly to understand his true vocation, and the reason for his presence here, before that solemn moment of illumination came in the baptism of Jordan? All the indications seem to point that way, scanty as may be the information at our command. The late Father Tyrrell, in the last book he ever wrote, declares that the secret which Jesus carried about with him from that day forward was his consciousness of belonging to the transcendental world, of being the Lord from Heaven of pious expectation, whose mission it was to vanquish evil through suffering, and that he never told this secret till the grand crisis was past.

Professor Sanday, of Oxford, one of the most distinguished of orthodox New Testament

Intrusion of the Transcendental

scholars, in his recently published, very suggestive study of the personality of the Master, puts forward the hypothesis that the deity of Jesus resided in his sub-consciousness, and that what we would call his waking consciousness, his every-day consciousness, was truly and certainly human. I cannot but feel that both of these theories are more than mere speculations. They fit in with the evidence; they describe just what we ought to expect if it be true, as all the highest spiritual experience has consistently affirmed through all ages, that there is a transcendental world and that a mighty being once left it in order to take upon himself our burden and help us to win our fight.

But there is something else which these facts tell us, too. It is that the very same thing must be true in some degree, however restricted, of you and me and all mankind. Do you know yourself? Who are you? What are you? Do you never feel the touch of the transcendental?

That part of us which lies far below the ordinary threshold of our consciousness, and sinks away without a break into the infinitude of God, is eternal and divine. It is through that gateway that higher energies filter into the soul.

“Thou life within my life, than self more near!
Thou veiled Presence infinitely clear!
From all illusive shows of sense I flee,
To find my centre and my rest in Thee.

Intrusion of the Transcendental

“Take part with me against those doubts which rise
And seek to throne Thee far in distant skies!
Take part with me against the self that dares
Assume the burden of these sins and cares!”

There is a beautiful legend believed in by the fisher-folk of a certain village on the coast of Brittany. The same legend appears in more or less modified form on other connections, too, but the one I am thinking of at the moment is somewhat as follows. It is said that where the sea now rolls immediately in front of the village in question there once stood a mighty city, with domes and spires and many rare and stately buildings. But one day a great inundation took place and the city sank far down beneath the waters of the ocean; there it will remain until the day of resurrection when it will rise to the surface once more in all its former glory. And the fishermen tell that when they are out in their boats on specially calm days, when air and sea are still and quiet, they can hear the tolling of the Cathedral bell of the submerged city. Have you never heard the tolling of the Cathedral bell in the depths of your soul, in hours when the noise of the surface life is stilled, and you are able to listen for the music of eternity? Have you never heard it? Yes, I am sure you have. It tells of something buried but not destroyed, something gloriously waiting to be revealed in your conscious experience by-and-by.

Ah yes! ah yes! we are not the isolated beings

Intrusion of the Transcendental

that we seem; we are submerged in God like islands in the sea — a tiny surface only showing — and the shores of our being are washed by the waters of eternal life and love. We have never been left to ourselves, nor is this dream-land our city of habitation. This is what Jesus came to show us, and to open the way home.

“And when that day, we know not when or how,
Of restitution on the world shall break,
Oh! Friend, shall any gladder soul than thou
From the long sleep awake?
To find thy dark misgivings all at rest,
All thy deep yearnings at the fountain stilled:
To see what sage and prophet dimly guessed
Beyond all hope fulfilled.

XV

**THE CHRIST OF THE NEWER
CRITICISM**

“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing ye might have life through his name. — John xx, 30–31.

“And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. — John xxi, 25.

XV

THE CHRIST OF THE NEWER CRITICISM

THE last chapter of St. John's Gospel is plainly an addendum to the original book, though whether it is from the same hand or a different one is another question. Certainly the story in chapter xxi is quite in the same style as the rest of the Gospel, but you can see for yourselves that the book ends naturally with the former of my two texts, the closing verse of chapter xx. Perhaps later on the author thought fit to add the beautiful piece of tradition of which he makes an allegorical use, thus necessitating an extra chapter. But whether this is so or not there can be little doubt that our second text, the verse which is now the last in the book, was the comment added by some pious copyist afterwards, for the book is quite complete without it.

Thus these two texts, which in form somewhat resemble each other, form two definite and separate endings to the fourth gospel. But, as I hope you will agree with me before I have done, they are both so true, and so valuable an expression of Christian experience concerning our

Christ of the Newer Criticism

Lord, that they may very well be allowed to stand together. In the former the author frankly avows that his object in writing has been to convince his readers of the divine dignity of Jesus and of the fact that he is able to impart to them what the evangelist calls "life." We are not much in doubt as to what he means by life, for he recurs to it again and again throughout the book. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." This knowledge of God is something far higher than any knowledge which is of the mind only; it is the awakening of the spiritual consciousness, as differentiated from the merely intellectual; more I cannot say just now, but you all know sufficiently well what I mean. In the second text the writer makes a bold, and, at first sight, somewhat hyperbolical assertion. He declares that Jesus has done a great many things which not only are not written in this book, but that the world itself would not be big enough to hold the books that could be written on the subject. Evidently this statement is an allusion to our first text; the commentator wants to go one better than the modest and obvious remark that the fourth gospel does not contain, and does not profess to contain, an adequate account of all that Jesus said and did in the presence of his disciples. No, he adds, and no other earthly book could contain it either, for the Master's sayings and doings

Christ of the Newer Criticism

relate to other and higher worlds than this. The remark is not nonsensical, you see; it is not a mere outburst of rhetorical enthusiasm; it is a quiet and restrained reminder of the fact that according to Christian faith our Lord Jesus Christ is the Word by whom the worlds were made. How could the world itself contain a full record of his activities if the world itself is only one of those activities? That this is the meaning of the passage is, I think, beyond all reasonable doubt. It is an emphatic affirmation of the cosmic significance of the personality of our blessed Lord and Master. I shall have to refer to this point again in a few moments.

Some time ago, you may remember, I discussed with you the question of the historicity of Jesus with special reference to the Christ Myth controversy now going on amongst biblical scholars and critics. All I did then was to try to show that the critics who maintain that the eternal Christ has never been specially manifested in any one earthly personality have not made out their case; on the contrary I hold that apart from the historical Jesus our devotion to the eternal Christ could not have been what it is today or anything like it; we adore the Christ because he has come to us as Jesus. What should we know about the Christ today but for Jesus?

But there is another aspect of this subject on which I did not touch, namely, what the newer criticism, in the hands of those who admit

Christ of the Newer Criticism

the historicity of Jesus, is telling us about him. Really this whole field of inquiry, just now, is most interesting and important and everybody ought to know about it. For, understand, the school of critics which maintains that the eternal Christ has never really lived on earth as Jesus is a very small one after all; by far the larger number of representatives of the newer criticism are saying something quite different; they are saying that Jesus really lived, but that he was not at all the kind of person that liberal Protestants, for instance, have imagined. Let us briefly examine the situation and you will soon see how the matter stands.

A generation or more ago, as many of you are old enough to recollect, the great cry in the religious world was, "Back to Christ." Such books as Professor Seeley's *Ecce Homo* and Renan's *Life of Jesus* had a tremendous vogue. There was a widespread feeling that an unprejudiced examination of the Christian sources would reveal to us a winsome personality, a character of enormous spiritual force, at the beginning of Christian history, but far different from the ecclesiastical Christ, the Christ of dogma as he has been presented to us for many centuries. Quite an enthusiasm arose for this. People thought that if they could only get at Jesus himself, Jesus as he really was, Jesus as he lived and taught amongst the fisher-folk of Galilee nearly two thousand years ago, they would find someone whom they could love and

Christ of the Newer Criticism

reverence without having to swallow all that has since become traditionally associated with his name. They wanted "the lowly man of Galilee," the sweet teacher of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, and they firmly believed he was there to be found. What they wanted was to disinter his personality from the mass of dogmatic accretions that had gradually been imposed upon it, and then, they were sure, all would be well. For a time this tendency seemed to carry all before it, especially in Germany. We have had a perfect cataract of "Lives of Jesus," studies of Jesus, impressions of Jesus, written by various experts more or less on the lines of Renan and Seeley. Men like Harnack, Sabatier, and Bousset have familiarised us with a picture of the Master from which all the usual dogmatic accompaniments have been carefully eliminated. It would not be true to say that the Christ of liberal Protestantism, as represented by these authorities, had no divine attributes; but in the main it is unquestionable that they have presented him to us as the "good man," the God-sent man, the forerunner of a nobler humanity, whose work it was to utter the simple message of divine love, and who was killed for doing it. We were told that even those nearest to him did not clearly understand what he was aiming at, and have misrepresented him in their reports of his words; that he never laid claim to the position since accorded him in

Christ of the Newer Criticism

relation to the Godhead; and that his pure spiritual teaching has been overlaid even in the New Testament, and increasingly ever since, with an enormous amount of superstition and irrational assumption derived from other sources and utterly foreign to his mind.

But where are we now? As the late Father Tyrrell has pointed out in his "Christianity at the Cross Roads," the criticism of the gospel sources thus begun has gone farther than its original promoters ever dreamed. Most reluctantly, little by little, step by step, the newer criticism has been forced to the conclusion that the Jesus of liberal Protestantism has never existed; the real Jesus was a very different being from the fancy pictures of him painted by Renan, Seeley, and all their modern imitators. He was not the mildly reasonable teacher, too great for his time, who essayed the vain task of trying to make his generation understand the meaning of the word love; he was far nearer to the ecclesiastical Christ than the modern mind can readily understand. I say that for the most part the critics did not want to arrive at this conclusion. They wanted, and expected to discover, a Jesus who was a sort of anticipation nineteen hundred years ago of a modern Broad Churchman. Against their wills they have been forced to admit that he was quite another sort of person.

Then what sort of a person was Jesus? Remember, I am trying to describe the Christ of

Christ of the Newer Criticism

the newer criticism. He believed in all that his contemporaries believed concerning the apocalyptic kingdom, the kingdom of God which was to come suddenly by a tremendous invasion from above. He believed in himself, not as an ordinary human being, but as the Man from heaven, the Son of God, the superhuman instrument, long expected, long foretold, through whom mankind should be brought into right relations with God. He believed he possessed a consciousness of God such as no one else possessed, and that in virtue of that consciousness he could mediate God to the world as no one else could. He believed in his own pre-existence, as a necessary corollary to this position; he held that he had already enjoyed a dignity and glory with his Father in heaven which he had laid aside in order to come to earth. He believed that he had come to die a death of mysterious efficacy, and that this, and not his teaching, was of principal benefit to mankind. Moreover, he believed that in the new dispensation which would follow upon his death he would be the judge of the human race.

This is Jesus as he emerges from the newer criticism. Was he merely a deluded visionary? If so, we are forced to the conclusion that the sublimest spiritual movement the world has ever known was the outcome of a madman's dream. No wonder that those who expected to find at the beginning of Christianity a purely spiritual teacher, who made no lofty pretensions

Christ of the Newer Criticism

of a supernatural kind, are dissatisfied with their discovery. But all the same I am thankful for it. This Jesus is more nearly what I want than a teacher who was no saviour would have been, and I am far from being alone in saying so even among the most liberal of liberal Christians. For this Jesus is not the special property of ecclesiasticism; he belongs as ever to mankind, and it is the best of good news that all authority is committed unto him in heaven and on earth, so far as we are concerned. There is a new kind of liberal Christianity growing up, a liberal Christianity which no longer tries to explain Jesus in terms of humanity but to explain humanity in terms of Jesus. A Jesus who is only one of ourselves, a man among men, guessing at the riddle of existence as we have to do, but knowing nothing certainly concerning either his own destiny or ours, might be a great teacher but he is not all our poor human nature needs. We want a deliverer who is a master in other worlds than this and knows it, a revealer who can speak as from the very heart of things and with the voice of God, but whose life is so intertwined with our own that nothing can be true of him which is not also potentially true of us. This is the real crux of the whole question. Are we, or are we not, beings of the same order as Jesus, though not yet of the same status? I affirm that we are, and that nothing he is ever recorded to have said is testimony to the contrary. I

Christ of the Newer Criticism

believe that Jesus was all that the Christian church throughout the ages has unceasingly declared him to be. I believe in his deity, explain it how you will. Evidently that deity was not inconsistent with a considerable limitation of his knowledge and power in the flesh, or with the adoring loyalty he rendered to the Father's will as though it were other than his own. I believe in the glory he had with the Father before the world was. I believe he was indeed the Logos through whom this universe of ours came into being, and that he was and is "the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." I believe he was born into this world of his own free will when the fulness of the time was come, and that he came not only to teach a truth but to do a work. I believe him to be both the saviour and the judge of humanity, for it is his life in us which breaks the bonds of sin and sets the prisoner free, and it is what he is that is the judgment upon what we are. Yes, a mighty being came to this world once as a little child, and died upon a cross as a young man, a being "who stood nearer," as F. W. H. Myers says, "by some space to us immeasurable, to that which is infinitely far." This being is at once our source and our goal, that aspect of the eternal reality in which we are all comprehended, our gateway into God. This is a wonderful thing to know, and the most beautiful thing that has ever been revealed to mankind.

Christ of the Newer Criticism

But what then are we? We are beings from that same eternal source, individualized here on earth that we may through struggle and suffering, conflict and overcoming, attain to God-consciousness in Christ. What there may be then for us to do has never been revealed, but there are some indications in the recorded words of Jesus that we in our turn shall become the Word of God to universes yet unborn. Take, for example, the parables of the talents and the pounds: "Thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things." Concerning our present relationship to Jesus permit me to recall to your minds a figure used by me in a sermon not long ago. Have you ever observed on the eastern horizon in a morning sky a phenomenon of this kind? The clouds which cover the face of the heavens, though closely connected with each other, are broken up into numberless clusters or centers of gradually intensifying light and color. As the sun rises beneath and behind them his rays become incarnate, as it were, in varying degree, in the whole mass until the entire panorama becomes a scene of wonderful and ever-changing beauty and splendor. Presently the sun himself bursts into view with dazzling radiance through a rift in the middle of the cloud system and touches it all with glory. Such is our relationship to our Lord. He is the sun; we are the clouds. He is the light in which our personality becomes visible, the light that is

Christ of the Newer Criticism

the very basis of our being. Some of us are very dark and dense, but as the sun of righteousness rises within us, with healing in his wings, we take on more and more of his eternal beauty and are conformed more and more closely unto his likeness. Once on the field of human history the very sun himself shone forth with naked flame in him whom we now worship as Jesus the Christ, whose life is the light of men. And concerning our destiny in him what better figure can we use than his own? He is the vine; we are the branches. But every branch is a potential vine. He is the tree; we are the fruit. But every fruit is a potential tree.

“Who art thou, Christ?

O Jew, whom thine own generation would not
That all the generations might possess,
Thou who dost greatly shape our latter days
And of the sleeping future art the promise,
Thou scorned and buffeted the more to bless,
Thou put to man's last shame from shame to free,
Thou who didst die triumphantly to live,
On whom the great world leans of Christendom,
On whom the mighty thinkers fix their thoughts
Perplexed, who dost allure even worldly men;
Dreamer whose gaze is on eternity,
Victor of fate and its accomplisher,
Who art not and who art for evermore
Above all heroes, prophets, poets, saints,
In thy great personality remote;
August, serenely smiling at our doubts,
Elusive, yet beside our thought alway;
Thou who art still the loneliest of men,
Thou paradox and potent mystery,

Christ of the Newer Criticism

So hated and so loved — Who art thou Christ?
For no mere shade of history thou art,
Who in thine hour of utmost weakness still
Didst claim the grand prerogative of God,
Going to death not as we captives go,
But willingly and with triumphant step —
A living Christ thou art eternally,
Imperatively haunting who ignore,
A closest friend, a presence never far,
A lover terrible e'en to thy loved,
A sympathiser knowing human flesh,
A critic going to the very soul,
An awful judge whose right to doom is clear,
A man of heaven come down to help our clay,
A man of earth to lift us to the heavens.
O for the eyes to see thee as thou art!
O for a heart all-passionate for thee!"

I am unwilling to cease speaking without trying to relate this wonderful Christ to the individual needs of any or all of you who may have come here to seek him this morning. Are you in heaviness of spirit? Behold the man of sorrows who has plumbed the depths of human woe for our sakes. Are you ashamed of the foulness of your record, tormented with the consciousness of a sin you cannot escape? Behold him who knew no sin, yet has assumed the burden of it that we might be freed therefrom. Are you companionless, lonely, weak, overwhelmed with odds in the battle of life? Behold the friend that sticketh closer than a brother, the helper who never scorns unworthiness yet refuses to be content with less than our best. Behold Jesus.

XVI

THE RISEN LORD IN THE MIDST

AN EASTER SERMON

“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut, where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus, and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, ‘Peace be unto you.’” — JOHN XX, 19.

XVI

THE RISEN LORD IN THE MIDST

IN all the gospel accounts of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to his disciples none are more touching than those in the twentieth and twenty-first chapters of St. John. Here we have the detailed record of the conversation between Mary Magdalene and the Master, amid the breaking shadows of the morning; here are the two visits to the little company in the upper room, the second apparently being a special one for the sake of the apostle not present at the first; here too are the extremely beautiful and suggestive accounts of the appearance to the fishermen who had been toiling fruitlessly all night on the Galilean lake, concluding with the threefold interrogation of the Apostle Peter — “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?” — and the commission to him to feed the flock of Christ.

With the single exception of the story of the journey to Emmaus, nothing in the older gospels approaches in beauty these well told narratives of the doings of the risen Lord. This gospel does not stand on the same historical footing

Risen Lord in the Midst

as the other three, and its aim is not to give us a biography but the presentation of an exalted spiritual experience. Nevertheless, there is without doubt an historical basis for the accounts given here of these valedictory appearances of the Master.

I have never been able to feel that the reasons advanced by most modern liberal minded Christians against belief in the physical resurrection of Jesus are quite satisfactory or carry conviction. It seems to me they are mostly due to a bias against accepting the miraculous elements in the gospel story; and that, I am convinced, is a mistake which before long we shall have to admit. If we were not so over-ready to take for granted the apparent distinction between matter and spirit we should not see difficulties where none exist.

After all, matter is only the language of spirit, and it would be no more difficult for God to use that kind of language than any other as a means of declaring the triumph of good over evil and life over death.

To be sure, the New Testament accounts of the appearances of Jesus to his followers, after his body had been laid in the tomb, are not completely consistent with each other; but it is perfectly clear that unless the apostles had been absolutely convinced that Jesus was alive they would not have behaved as they did afterwards; and there is this fact to take into consideration, that they had no conception of a

Risen Lord in the Midst

reappearance of the dead which was not an appearance of the body.

There is therefore a strong presentment in favor of the view universally held by them — and which never seems to have been questioned among them — that when they saw their Master again they saw him in the very body in which they had known him before he was crucified. To some of you this will sound like the most hopeless obscurantism; but do not be quite so sure. One very remarkable thing about the psychic phenomena which are being so painstakingly investigated by competent scientific men of the time, is the fact that all that is recorded of the supernormal behavior of the body of the risen Lord can apparently be paralleled in our own times. I do not refer to the rising of a dead body from the grave; that I confess was unique, so far as we are aware, because the work that thereby had to be done was unique. But the passage of matter through matter does seem to take place; it is practically an established fact, just as wonderful in its way as anything we are told in the New Testament about the body of Jesus after the resurrection; the appearance and disappearance of solid substances in supernormal fashion is, so we are assured, by no means unknown. We shall know more about these things in a few years' time. To call an event miraculous only means that we have not yet discovered the law by which it takes place. What is here told of the

Risen Lord in the Midst

appearances of Jesus to his disciples, through closed doors, is not to be lightly set aside as incredible, nor need we assume that those who were present either saw a ghost or were the victims of hallucination.

But I do not forget that whenever this particular writer makes use of a fact he does so with the object of setting before us some aspect of the spiritual life, which is just as true for us as for the apostles. Let us see if we can find out what it is in this case. Here is a little company not yet emancipated from fear of the evil power that had crucified their Master, and not yet fully awake to the marvelous significance of the assurance they had received that he was still alive. Their doors were shut for fear of the Jews. Something was needed to make them care no more about bolted doors and artificial protections against what man might do, and that something was afforded when Jesus came and stood in the midst and gave his benediction to the awestricken assembly. All they had now to do was to wait, and pray together, until the power of the Holy Ghost fell upon them and drove them forth to witness for the Christ who had brought life and immortality to light.

Comparatively few people seem to be aware of the enormous difference which the resurrection of Jesus made in the attitude of his followers towards the fact of death. Over the ancient world the shadow of death hung like a pall. You have only to read the literature of

Risen Lord in the Midst

the cultivated paganism of New Testament times to satisfy yourself of this; there is a certain sadness observable in it all, due to the absence of any inspiring hope concerning the life to come. Jesus changed all that, and it is unquestionable that no small part of the early triumphs of Christianity were the direct result of the exuberant confidence with which the Christians went to meet death.

In these days there is a good deal of slipping back into the pensive mood of the ancient world in regard to death and after. I often meet people like that — good people too, high-souled and brave, people who are not in the least afraid of death for themselves, but who have nothing to hope therefrom. One by one their dearest cross the dark river and are seen no more, taking with them as they go some portion of the very soul of the mourners they leave behind, and robbing life of much of its interest and charm; one by one the doors close behind sweet affections, holy memories, tender friendships, noble examples; and for many people that door remains closed; if ever they turn their eyes towards it, it is with wistful and unsatisfied longing to know for certain something of what lies on the further side.

Now I do not for a moment believe that, if those mysterious portals were flung wide, and we could see without hindrance all the secrets of the great beyond, we should necessarily be either better or happier. On the contrary the prob-

Risen Lord in the Midst

ability is that, average human nature being what it is, sacred realities would be degraded to the ordinary levels of human intercourse in this world; in our knowledge of life we cannot rise above what we are. What is wanted is a certain quality of life itself which will carry with it assurance of the nearness and sweetness of the best and highest in the eternal kingdom of love.

That quality of life is exactly what faith in Jesus has power to evoke. The doors that separate seen from unseen may remain shut to our mortal vision, but One comes from the further side and stands in the midst and makes us know that all is well.

“When some beloved voice that was to you
Both sound and sweetness, faileth suddenly,
And silence, against which you dare not cry,
Aches round you like a strong disease and new —
What hope? what help? what music will undo
That silence to your sense? Not friendship’s sigh,
Not reason’s subtle count. . . . Nay, none of these! —
Speak thou! availing Christ! — and fill this pause.”

This is no mere fancy of the religious consciousness but an experience that has been tested and proved through many centuries? That which came to the disciples in the upper room, in their vision of the risen Lord, forthwith became a new life. It did not seem to matter to them that the bodily Christ came no more, or that they never heard again the beloved and familiar voice saying in tones that could be

Risen Lord in the Midst

heard by the fleshly ear, "Peace be unto you." They did not need these things except as the starting point and outward token of the new experience. Henceforth that experience was inward and spiritual, not outward and material.

And so it is today. The divine indweller, the Christ eternal, who was and is Jesus, is the most potent of all realities to him who has come to see that life is spirit, the unfolding of God, the growing of the soul. If you can once get that assurance, and build on it and be faithful to it through every changing scene, you will not tremble before the closed doors that shut you out for a brief moment from the greater light and glory of the life beyond. Christ is on both sides of those doors; indeed everything you have ever seemed to lose that was beautiful and good is on both sides of those doors, for it is part of the very life of Christ. Nay, we may go further and say, There are no doors of separation between your soul and the eternal highest except to your limited earthly vision; Christ in the heart is the token of the immediate presence of all the good your soul has ever craved and all the gladness of which you may have been momentarily deprived.

But the matter does not end here. There is the further question of the practical value of fellowship with the living Christ as the dynamic of high service in the busy world. You know how we ordinarily behave in our dealings with one another, and our general attitude to the

Risen Lord in the Midst

problems of conduct. We are usually afraid of something or other, and taking care to guard against it, as far as human wisdom and knowledge will permit. We carefully shut the door on opportunity, and cower behind it, anxious, and in dread of the untried future. We allow our minds to be occupied and our hearts disturbed by considerations that belong mainly to the obvious and external. Watch the average man, Christian or non-Christian, and see if I am not right in what I say. What is that man doing most of his time? Why, barring the door as fast as he can against possible misfortune or suffering for himself and the little group around him.

It is a rare thing — one of the rarest things in life — to meet a man who is not afraid. Actually some of those who do not believe that life has any other than a material basis seem less afraid of what it may bring forth than some of those who profess to believe that its basis is spiritual. It is a great thing, a moral tonic, to meet a man who is not afraid, but it is an experience we very seldom have. Those who can say it, are those who see far into the beautiful meanings of life and know that appearances count for nothing in the things of God.

I am not telling you that your proper attitude towards trouble is always that of patient, passive resignation. Sometimes it may be so, as was the case with Jesus in Gethsemane and in the hands of his murderers, but generally it is not so. It was not so with him in the things

Risen Lord in the Midst

that led him to Calvary. He suffered there, and rose victorious from the tomb in which his enemies thought they had laid him forever, just because he had not been careful to shut the door between himself and danger when he was about his Father's business. There must be no coward compromises, no wretched subterfuges, no harnessing of worldly wisdom to the chariot of the truth of God.

When the Master stood before Thomas and his friends in that little upper room so long ago, and held out his wounded hands to them, it was a call to war. A divine enthusiasm was kindled in their souls, an enthusiasm for him, a willingness to dare anything and everything in the cause for which he had suffered and died. The appearance of Jesus on the inner side of those closed doors meant that before long they were flung wide open, that a dauntless band of warriors might go forth to do battle in his invincible name. The very things they had been afraid of before he came, they were afraid of no longer — neither shame, nor scorn, nor loss of friends and worldly goods, nor bonds and stripes, nor poverty and starvation, nor death itself in whatsoever guise it might come. Have you ever read James Russell Lowell's noble tribute to Wendell Phillips?

“He stood upon the world's broad threshold; wide
The din of battle and of slaughter rose;
He saw God stand upon the weaker side,
That sank in seeming loss before its foes;

Risen Lord in the Midst

Many there were who made great haste and sold
Unto the cunning enemy their swords:
He scorned their gifts of fame, and power, and gold,
And, underneath their soft and flowery words,
Heard the cold serpent hiss; therefore he went
And humbly joined him to the weaker part,
Fanatic named, and fool, yet well content
So he could be the nearer to God's heart,
And feel its solemn pulses sending blood
Through all the widespread veins of endless good."

We, imperfect and unimportant though we may be, are just as good material as the Galilean peasants to whom Jesus came, fresh from his own grapple with death, nineteen hundred years ago. And here he stands in our midst at this moment; no doors of ignorance and worldly wisdom can keep him out. Outside those doors of yours — those doors of petty selfishness, and no less petty fears, great things are calling, and the urge which you feel in your soul to respond is the voice of Christ himself. You have got to go out and destroy some of the shams and lies that vex the groaning earth. You know what they are; so does everybody, and everybody does a little, in a more or less harmless way, to deprecate them and bid them go. No great evil ever does go until somebody has been crucified; it is the great life-giving law by which God is working out the redemption of the race.

There is more here than you can see. Here in the midst stands our dear Lord with the print of the nails in his outstretched hands; here in every heart, calling us out into the open where

Risen Lord in the Midst

he himself, unaided and alone, turned the tide of battle against the hosts of hell. It is very sweet to have him here; the first thought of all who are conscious of his presence is that they are glad to see the Lord. He brings us comfort, assurance, something of the very breath of heaven. There was in the upper room a holy calm; there is in the human heart a wondrous peace, when Christ is there.

But why did he come to that upper room so long ago? History has written the glorious tale in letters of blood and fire. And why has he come now? Let your heart supply the answer. It is as true today as it ever was that you cannot follow him without taking up the cross. There is an awful amount of hypocrisy talked in the name of Jesus. As a general rule — I do not say always, but as a general rule — those who are most really serving our Master are not held in much honor by the world. They do not come easily into the high places; they do not get many of the prizes that are going. Scorn, persecution, ostracism are still their portion; and as often as not these things are inflicted in the very name of Christ himself. Do not look for the true followers of Jesus in the soft and easy places of life, sheltered from its biting ills, but rather in the ranks of those the world sets little store by, or visits with its ready penalties. Of which company are you going to be?



XVII

THE PRICE OF THE SOUL

“What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”
— MARK VIII, 37.

XVII

THE PRICE OF THE SOUL*

THIS abrupt question raises more issues and penetrates deeper into the mystery of human existence than is immediately apparent from the form of it. It is not so often quoted as the complementary one which precedes it — “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” But it deserves to be. Of the two sayings the profounder is the one we have made our text, though it is true that they are closely interdependent. How many sermons have we not heard, how many evangelical appeals, based upon the striking but quite obvious idea of the bad bargain involved in gaining the world and losing the soul! We know, too, what is usually meant by this kind of alternative. But is it quite so easy to understand what is meant by asking what a man ought to be prepared to *give* in order to obtain possession of his own soul? This is the theme I wish to keep before your minds this morning, and I repeat that I do not think it usually presents itself in this way to the mind of the ordinary reader of the New

* Preached in London after return from the United States.

The Price of the Soul

Testament. Most of our attention has been given to the former half of the interrogatory, namely, the danger of losing the soul by gaining the world. But how about this other and bigger problem, the problem of the price to be paid in exchange for the soul? Is it not rather a startling suggestion that such a price needs to be paid at all? Has the soul then to be gained; is it not ours already? If not, what does its possession involve? and what have we that we can give in exchange for the soul? You see how serious, as well as searching the question is. May the Holy Spirit guide us to a right understanding of our divine Master's purpose in asking it!

In the first place let me point out that in the Authorised Version of the New Testament a little confusion is caused, to the uninstructed reader, by the fact that one and the same Greek word, which appears in two consecutive verses, is translated by two different English terms. The word "soul," in our text, is rendered "life" in the verse just above — "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it, etc." To be consistent throughout, either this well-known passage ought to read, "Whosoever will save his soul shall lose it," or our text ought to be, "What shall a man give in exchange for his life?" As a matter of fact it is the latter alternative which is actually adopted in the Revised Version, but it is not wholly free from objections, either. The life here spoken of is not mere animal existence; it is the essential man, the spiritual being,

The Price of the Soul

tabernacled in the world of flesh and sense, but having his truest affinities with the world of eternal life and love. It is that life, our fundamental selfhood, deriving immediately from God, which we have to discover and free from the dominion of everything false and unreal. But for the moment, and for the sake of illustration, as I believe Jesus intended by this use of language, let us confine the word life to the physical plane. What would you say of a man who should set himself to gain a certain success on the clear understanding that as soon as he had got it he was to die? I mean, of course, worldly success — riches, fame, honor, and the like. Would it be worth anybody's while to obtain the highest distinction that the world could give if the price thereof were death? Would you be content to pay it? Hardly, I should think, if you knew what you were doing. Suppose that tomorrow you could be assured of being king of England, or prime minister, or the richest man in the world, or in fact of achieving any distinction you chose to covet, but with the condition attached that as soon as you entered upon it, or shortly afterwards, you would have to forfeit your life, would you accept the bargain? It is not inconceivable that somebody might — one person in a million, perhaps, who wanted "one crowded hour of glorious life." But the great majority of the human race would unhesitatingly decline any such offer. In ancient Mexico, before the

The Price of the Soul

advent of Christopher Columbus and the Spanish conquerors, there was one strange custom connected with the great periodical religious festivals. A young man used to be selected from amongst the flower of the nation as the victim destined to be sacrificed to the gods, as the crowning event in a long series of solemn ceremonies. For a whole year this young man was the idol of the community, the most honored figure in every assembly, taking precedence of the highest dignitaries in the land. He had no wish which was not immediately gratified. Wherever he appeared crowds gathered to pay him reverence; he was clothed in the richest garments, followed and waited on by a large retinue of servants, lodged in palaces and surfeited with luxury. Everything that could be done for him was done; no earthly potentate could have received more deference during that one year. But on the last day thereof he was carried in joyous procession, the whole country making fete, to the foot of a high tower at the top of which was the altar of sacrifice. As the procession began to ascend the winding stair which led to this dreadful goal the poor youth had to strip off, one by one, all his gorgeous trappings, to tear in pieces his garland of flowers, break and fling away the lute he carried in his hand, and, at the final stage of the ascent, enter alone the sacrificial chamber, hung with black drapery, where masked priests stood silently waiting to bind

The Price of the Soul

him and drain away his life-blood. One cannot imagine that those twelve months of anticipation were very happy ones to the subject of them, notwithstanding the exaltation of feeling that was his at the thought that he had been chosen for a position higher far than anything that could be attained by his fellows of his own age and station. He had gained the highest rank he was capable of imagining on earth, but it had cost him life itself.

Now turn the illustration the other way round. Suppose that that young man had been born to the destiny I have been describing; suppose he had known all along that his life would end on a certain day in a certain way, and that until then he was free to enjoy the best that earth could afford without lack or stint, but that he could, if he so chose, exchange all these dignities and emoluments for the sake of living through his natural term like other people. I think I am not far wrong in averring that he would long before have shown that he was prepared to barter everything for his life. I admit that there might have been other considerations which would lead him to choose differently. He might have felt that it was a great and glorious thing to die for his people in this way and that his sacrifice would be meritorious; or he might have had a base nature which was content to enjoy the present, regardless of the future; but on the whole it is fairly certain that any sane, normal, healthy

The Price of the Soul

human being would be more than willing to exchange worldly glitter and glory for the gift of life. This instinctive clinging to life is a curious but indubitable fact, especially when we consider how hard it is for the majority of people, even at the best. One is glad to acknowledge, of course, that there are circumstances under which the average man would be nobly willing to lay down his life — sometimes for a loved one, sometimes to save a comrade, sometimes for one's country, or, it may be, for a great ideal, or at the call of high duty. But it is quite certain that no wise and right-minded person has ever yet preferred mere wealth and personal prominence to life as such. The thing to be gained at such a price is too utterly mean, too pitifully contemptible to be worthy of serious consideration.

But now let us give to the word "life" the larger meaning which it possesses in my text, and let us see whether some of us are not in danger of being guilty of this very thing. The mere prolonging of earthly existence is a small matter compared with the quality of that life in relation to its eternal destiny. And here is where the true significance of this solemn warning becomes most apparent. Most of us, practically all of us, would choose life rather than worldly good if it came to the pinch; but what are we choosing, after all? If the value of life ought properly to be measured in terms of the soul — and surely that is the right way to measure it —

The Price of the Soul

the majority of us are making but a poor thing of it, day by day. We are bartering sacred things for secular, the solid for the ephemeral, reality for appearance, peace of heart for vanity and pretence. Our Lord Jesus Christ has taught us that this earth-world is but a training ground for the soul; that is why we are in it, and if we fail to realize it we have missed life. Viewed from this standpoint what a poor miserable waste many of us are making of it! We are continually sacrificing soul to sense instead of making sense minister to soul. And the fact becomes all the more serious when once we realize that the soul is not ours to begin with, but has to be made ours; it has to be achieved, gained, won, built in the likeness of Christ, and to this end we are unceasingly having to pay the price of a thoroughgoing surrender of everything inconsistent with, or antagonistic to, this supreme object of endeavor. I say the soul is not ours to begin with. No man is in possession of his own soul till he sees it in relation to the eternal, beholds it in the light of God. Neither the animal man, the mental man, nor the psychic man are to be confounded with the spiritual man, though the latter be lord of all the other three. The spiritual consciousness, properly so-called, is born when the soul learns to look up into the face of God and to realize its kinship with the divine nature. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him;

The Price of the Soul

neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned." "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other." The one great thing that we, individually, have to do in life, is to find and possess our own souls, and this we cannot do apart from the saving grace of God. I hope you see what I mean. No man has really found himself whose interests are mainly on the material plane and whose thoughts are engrossed with the things of this world, considered as ends in themselves; he does not know his own soul; he is only a kind of higher animal untouched by the sense of the eternal. But the soul, the soul! — all the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them fade into insignificance before the infinite value of one single human soul. They are all but negligible in comparison; they are as dust in the balance. Any value that this world possesses is but the value of the scaffolding in relation to the building that is to be. I understand now what John Henry Newman meant when he said in his *Apologia* that when he came to the great crisis of his life, when he stood hesitating between the church of England and Rome, he had no immediate guidance to offer to those who sought it, for the one all-dominating quest before him was that of learning how to save his own soul, or rather of knowing where to find salvation for his own soul. Yes, it is indeed true that the first of all questions for any man

The Price of the Soul

is the question, "What shall I do to be saved?" For until this question finds an answer one's proper place even in this life has not been reached, one's highest ministry to mankind remains undischarged.

And how is the world of today facing that question? You have only to look around and you will soon see. My recent visit to America has made plainer to me the nature and direction of some of the characteristic tendencies of our time, which are more accentuated, up to the present, in the new world than in the old. In the mad race for money, the scramble to excel one's fellows, the cruel merciless competition between man and man for the possession of worldly good, the claims of the soul are ignored and trampled upon. Again and again, in the course of my travels, I have been thrown into the company of men whose general quality could be summed up in one word, "soul-lessness." There was only that one word for it. It was plain to be seen that they lived for nothing, thought of nothing, wrought for nothing but dollars; they could imagine no good that could not be expressed in terms of dollars. Their higher faculties were atrophied; spiritual susceptibility they had none; all their ideals and aims were utilitarian, materialistic, mundane. Do not imagine that I am describing the character of the American people as a whole; I am not; I am merely indicating a spirit which is so widespread among them, and exercises

The Price of the Soul

an influence so great, as to be a menace to their national future. And, more or less, the same spirit or temper of mind is observable everywhere throughout Christendom, though in older countries it expresses itself in some other forms than the tireless pursuit of money. American worldliness has to be associated with money-getting; that is almost the only form it can take; but in England, and in Europe generally, it can find some alternative modes of gratifying itself. Pretentious idleness, pride of place, cynical indifference to the claims of the common weal, systematic and contemptuous negation of everything in the nature of idealism, are sufficiently common amongst us to warn us against feeling any undue superiority over our neighbors. I say this while gladly recognizing that, on both continents, there is a vast amount of elevated and unselfish zeal in the cause of human betterment, and that in the main the trend of things is towards a higher and purer conception of individual duty and social well-being.

But before you and I go our several ways this morning I must, in the name of Christ, thrust this one question upon you, What are you willing to give in exchange for your soul? Are you even capable of understanding what the question means? Forgive me for being so plain, but the truth is that every day I am myself realizing more and more the all-importance of this one definite issue: Are we finding our souls or are we not? Have you found yours? Are you a

The Price of the Soul

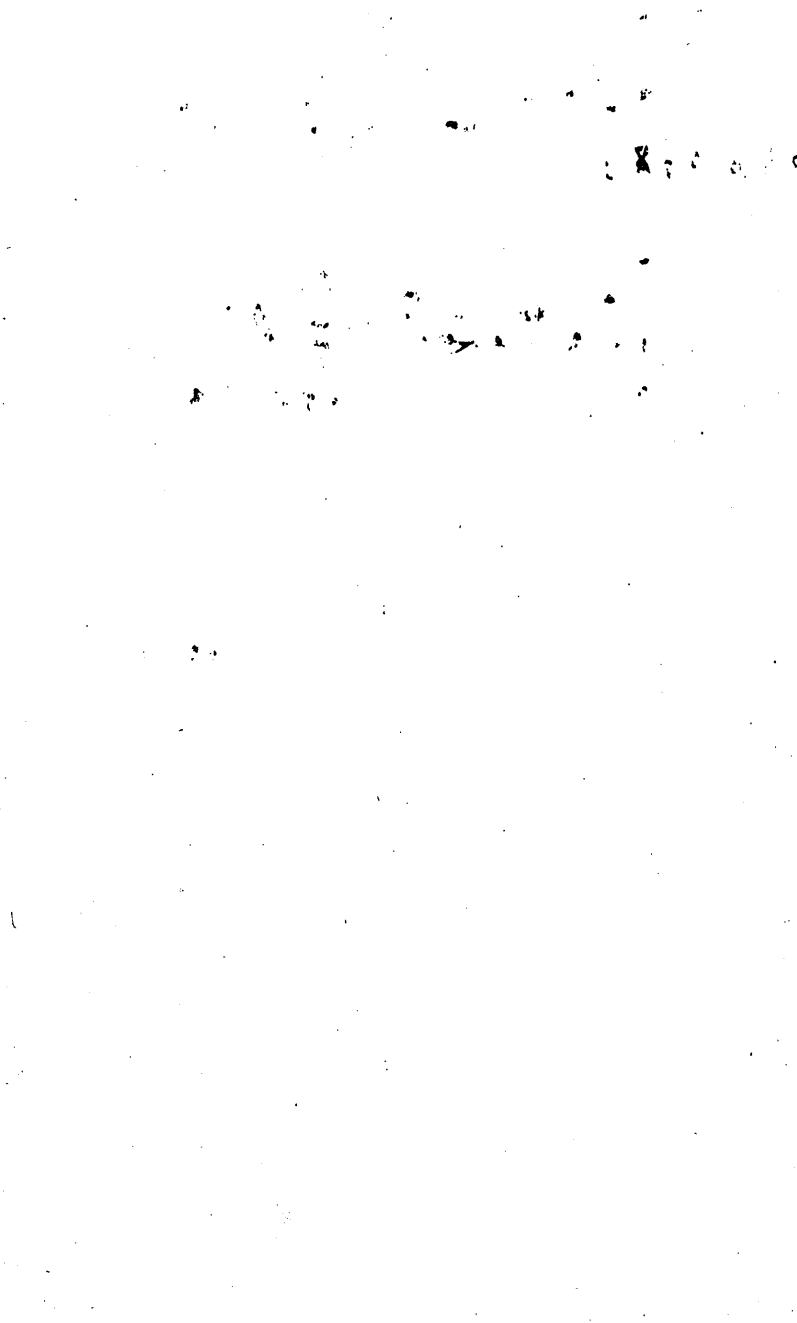
good man, a spiritually-minded man, are you trying to walk with God, or are all your satisfactions derived from gains and pleasures which are only of this world? When I say "a good man" I mean something more than ordinary uprightness, though certainly I do not mean a goodness you can regard with self-conscious complacency. I want to know whether you are striving, with all your might, to live in terms of that sonship to God revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Is there anything you would put higher than that in your thoughts and aspirations? What do you want most out of life? What manner of man are your daily endeavors and desires making of you? On what plane do your interests really move? Does holiness mean anything to you? Would you, before all things, prefer to have done, forever, with what you know to be base and foul and to be fully conformed to the likeness of Christ? Would you? Then you are seeking to win your soul. You cannot do it yourself; that is a task to which human wisdom and strength are unequal. Christ will put you in possession of your soul, will cleanse it from all iniquity, and sanctify it by the blessed spirit of eternal love till all earthly dross is purged away and you are made perfectly one with the righteousness of God.

"O Thou of purer eyes than to behold
Uncleanness! Lift my soul, removing all
Strange thoughts, imaginings fantastical,
Iniquitous allurements manifold!

The Price of the Soul

Make it a spiritual ark, abode
Severely sacred, perfumed, sanctified,
Wherein the Prince of Purities may abide —
The Holy and Eternal Spirit of God!"

But you have a part in this redemptive process, too; you have to give something in exchange for this precious gift of your soul as it comes from the Saviour's hand. The world and all its vanities must go; you cannot live for that and live for God also. All selfish purpose must be renounced, all evil affections crucified. When you know, as you do know, that there are things in your life that are coming between you and God, have done with them; you cannot dally with these without thrusting from you the very thing you want most. "He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul." Yield anything but your soul. If you have any stubborn sin in your heart, any evil indulgence you are reluctant to let go, any wrongful habit for which you make excuses to yourself, or are unwilling to look straight in the face and acknowledge for what it is, get rid of it at once; have no truce with the unclean thing; as long as you consent to keep it there you are withholding the price of your soul from the Lord. Give him all, for all he must have and will be satisfied with nothing less. Have nothing in your life which you cannot consecrate to him. Lose your whole being, your very soul, to him, and it will be given back to you enriched and purified, a temple illumined with the glory of God.



BX 5133 .C2h2 1912	Campbell The Ladder of Christ 385893
JUN 11 1943 JUN 28 1943	Henry Williams 042 So. Dorchester 6-25-43
	2- 12377

385893

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



48 452 742